

**Tradition and Transformation of Thai Classical Dance:
Nation, (Re) invention and Pedagogy**

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**to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in Drama
In October 2016**

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Abstract

This research aims to analyse the role and consequence of state patronage and promotion of Thai classical dance after the revolution of 1932, when the patronage of court dance changed from royal to state support. This research examines connections between the authority of the state, nationalism, Thai identity, and the invention of tradition, by focussing on the reconstruction of Thai classical dance, the promotion of spirituality in the *Wai Khru* ceremony, and dance pedagogy. This study uses historical research and ethnography through participant-observation, and interviews with senior dance teachers, national artists, masters of the *Wai Khru* ceremony, and dance artists in the Fine Arts Department, and also draws on the researcher's personal experience in dance training as a dancer and dance teacher for several years.

The thesis offers a detailed analysis of the socio-political context and cultural policy in relation to the establishment of the Fine Arts Department and the Dramatic Arts College; the national institutions whose main roles were to preserve, perform and offer training in traditional dance. After the revolution of 1932, the Fine Arts department played an important role to authorise, preserve, and standardise Thai classical dance. The function and meaning-making processes surrounding dance changed in accordance with the development of Thai identity and cultural policy. During the period 1932-1945, state policy emphasised the homogeneity of 'Thai-ness' and civilization, and traditional dance was adapted and combined with classical, folk and western elements. However, after the mid-1940s, the socio-political and cultural policies changed; the state operated the project of cultural revivalism. The court dance style and its rituals were revived with the establishment of a code of 'classicalism' which became the central aesthetic identification of Thai identity. The newly-coined classicalism has become the standard, and has been passed on to succeeding generations in the new educational system. These new invented traditions were preserved as if they were sacred, a practice which continues to the present.

Acknowledgements

A great number of people have helped and supported me throughout the process of writing this thesis. To all of them I want to express my deep gratitude: Thammasat University for funding and other forms of support which have allowed me to complete this thesis, and the University of Exeter.

Throughout my study at Exeter, I have been fortunate to have Professor Jane Milling as my supervisor. Her constant guidance, and her comments and suggestions in every supervision have been invaluable. Professor Milling has made it possible for me to finish this thesis. I am also grateful for the beneficial comments of my second supervisor, Professor Jerri Daboo who provided encouragement throughout the PhD process. My sincere gratitude to Dr. Kerrie Schaefer and Dr. Ashley Thorpe - my viva examiners, for their valuable comments and suggestions that help me to improve the quality of my thesis.

I would also like to thank those who have helped me in the earlier stages of my thesis. I am deeply indebted to my three academic mentors, Associate Prof. Chanthana Iamsakul, Arjan Suthida Kalayanarooj and Dr. Pornchai Sriprapai, for their generous encouragement.

I particularly indebted to all of my interviewees for sparing their precious time for interviews. Among the many national artists and senior dance masters who generously gave me their time, I am especially grateful to Arjan Noppharat Wangnaitham, Arjan Suwannee Chalanukhro, Arjan Rachana Pungprayong, Arjan Boonnak Tantranon, Arjan Nongyua Aumrunpongwattana, and Arjan Sakul Muengsakorn. At the National Conservatory in Bangkok, I received considerable support from the Head of Bunditpatanasilpa Institute, Dr. Chanai Vannalee, Assistant Prof. Kwanjai Kongthaworn, Asst. Prof. Dr. Jintana Saitongkum and teachers from the College of Dramatic Arts: Arjan Chalemchai Piromrak, Arjan Pramjai Pengsuk, Arjan Achara, Arjan Thanyawadee. I am

indebted to Arjan Sombati Kaewsujarit, Dr.Chulachart Aranyanak, Captain Dr. Akarin Pongpandecha, Tada Vithauapul, Thakoon Samranpong, Dr. Kerdsiri Noknoi for sharing their knowledge of the *Wai Khru* ceremony and the *Ong Phra Phirap* dance and dance artists in the Office of Performing Arts such as Dr. Pairoj Thongkumsuk, Somrat Thongtae, and Dr. Treeradach Klinchan.

The completion of this thesis could not have been possible without the companionship and help of my friends through the various stages of this project: Assistant Prof. Dr. Sukanya, Dr.Phakamas, Dr. Kailas, Dr. Alongkorn, and Dr.Valulee for sharing their research, and knowledge of cultural studies and Thai theatre. Many thanks to Arjan Siriphan, Arjan Asdavuth, Nareerat, Julsub, Watcharawan, Pimrat, Aekanan, Nathaya, Maneerat, Vorakrit, Prapasri, Worakamon, Katsamaporn, Sirirak, Jantima, Chalersak, Natthakan, Nantida, and Rattasard who help me with archival work in Thailand. I am greatly appreciative of my editor, English teachers in INTO tutorials, Suthee, Aqeel, Faustina, and am especially grateful to Sharanya who helped me with proofing. Special acknowledgements are due to my colleagues and staff at the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts at Thammasat University who have always supported me.

Special thanks to all my friends both in Thailand and in Exeter, for their support and encouragement during difficult times: Sonna, Nora, Sharanya, Evelyn, Swati, Sabina, P'thing, Pol, Gough, Fon, Lin, Poppy, Joyce, Ohm, Kim, Pom, Pat, Bua, Ome, Dao, Ta, P'Kob, Lee, Num, Off, Bom, Tew and Faulkners family.

A special note of thanks to my dear host family, who throughout the long years of my staying in UK have provides me with a sense of home and language: Lorraine and Rob.

Last but not least, I thank my beloved family in Thailand; my mother and father, Yuawapa and Vichit; my sister, Chonlada; my brother, Jakaphan; my sister-in-law, Monlarat, and all my relatives who are always with me, encouraging me to finish this thesis. To those are present but remain unnamed in this thesis, my thanks are due to them too.

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Introduction

In the modern period (1980s-1990s), when Thailand promoted traditional dance as a representation of Thai culture, the court dance style was adopted for recreational activities for Thai children. Most young students learned traditional Thai dance as amateur practitioners to develop performance skills. At the age of nine, I was witness to and part of that very situation; my mother enrolled me in a dance class, as she wanted me to perform on stage for special occasions such as birthdays or any celebrations. After training as a dancer for two years, I found an abiding love for Thai dance and decided to pursue dance studies in higher education. Initially, my family did not agree as they just wanted me to train as an amateur dancer instead of as a professional. This was because nobody in my family worked in the field of dance, and they feared that a career in dance did not have good future prospects. Despite their apprehensions, they supported my desire to study dance at the College of Dramatic Arts, a prestigious Thai classical dance institution in Thailand, from high school to the undergraduate level. Ten years of intensive training in dance have helped me to absorb the skills of classical dance, especially the sense of its sacredness.

In Thai classical dance, customs and rules are an important part of dance training and its performance, particularly in *Khon* and *Lakhon*, the classical Thai dance dramas. The most important ritual in Thai dance is the *Wai Khru* ceremony, an annual ceremony to pay one's respects to dance teachers which all dance students have to attend at least three times during their student lives; for example, at the start of training, at the higher level of the *Naphat* dance, and when the student is allowed to be a dance master. These rituals, which were intricately related to the method of traditional dance training, gradually instilled in me the sense of sacredness in classical Thai dance and the importance of being a traditional dancer. During my student life, I really believed in my

dance teachers and followed the rules of Thai dance performance. I never dared to challenge those rules or argue with my teachers.

However, my conservative approach to training in dance drama changed when I worked as a lecturer at the Drama Department, in the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Thammasat University. My responsibilities included teaching Thai theatre, both in theory and practice contexts. In the Drama Department, the purpose of teaching classical dance was totally different from that espoused by the College of Dramatic Arts in which the focus was on the adaptation and combination of traditional with modern elements, instead of teaching purely traditional aspects, as I was taught. Even though it was contradictory to my experience of training, it challenged and inspired me to raise questions of what is the 'essence' of Thai dance drama, why Thai dance was rigid in its performance and how it might be possible to combine it with contemporary modes without destroying the sense of tradition. When I was responsible for teaching modules like 'The History of Thai Theatre' and 'Thai Dance Theory', I found a gap between the history and the development of dance drama, partly caused by the state's patronage after the revolution of 1932. I became interested in exploring this gap, and how dance knowledge was reconstructed in a way that made it rigid and conservative, and shaped Thai beliefs of what classical dance should be.

In Thai dance drama discourse, the serious conflict between the conservation and development of classical dance has arisen many times. Many liberal scholars and artists, such as Sujit Wongthes and Pichet Klunchun, repeatedly criticise the influence of the state authority over Thai court dance. For instance, Wongthes, a renowned historian, argues in a recent article, '*Khon* is the unchangeable heritage, if we want to change, we have to wait until its sacredness has declined and disappeared' (Wongthes, 2016: 1). The insistence on preserving sacredness in classical dance as well as the state monopoly over Thai dance training has led to classical dance becoming like an artefact in a

museum more than a lively, dynamic art form. This point of view is also reflected in several criticisms of the contemporary Thai productions of Pichet Klunchun, a famous choreographer, by conservative dance teachers. My research aims to examine these two schools of thought further, tries to interrogate the possibility of common ground between them, and explores how the government plays an important role in the preservation and standardisation of classical dance. I mainly focus on the connection of three factors: the social-political change, the element of spirituality in classical dance and dance pedagogy, all of which profoundly influenced the reconstruction of traditional dance and the development of dance drama in contemporary times.

Overview and Research Questions

Classical Thai dance was developed by the royal court and has been considered to be distinctive, both refined and sophisticated in form. Historically, the classical arts were under the patronage of the kings, royal family and noblemen wherein the dances were developed from time to time depending on the social contexts of leisure and royalty. Rutnin (1993: xiii) points out that ‘alterations have become common practice; sometimes an improvement may have been made, while at other times, the dance form may have deteriorated’. In other words, the history of Thai classical dance, including its creation, growth and preservation as a distinct performance tradition was directly related to its patronage. In this research, I trace the social history of dance to understand the way in which patrons and connoisseurs have shaped the life of dance traditions, their structure and techniques, as well as the emerging repertoires. The main area of this research focuses on the early modern period when Thai performances were controlled by the first government’s establishment of a new institutional form for teaching and preserving the genre, beginning in 1932.

Thai classical dance radically changed after the Revolution of 1932, when the state underwent a change from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional democracy and the patronage of court dance shifted from the monarchy to the government. This was significant in that the government introduced a national culture policy, which aimed at establishing a unified Thai society with a standard Thai cultural identity. The new government established the Department of Fine Arts and the School of Dramatic Arts where the royal patronage of the classical arts including court dance training was transferred to these organisations. Since then, the transformation of court dance has altered not only in the Thai value system and culture but also in the role and function of Thai dance.

This research aims to focus on the changes in function, value and creativity of Thai classical dance after 1932, which continue to influence today's classical dance productions and training. My argument is that classical dances or court dances did not undergo a process of evolution after this point, as they have naturally been a part of a living royal tradition prior to 1932, because it became crucial to “preserve” the dances as part of a national Thai cultural identity.

The study of traditional dance after state patronage cannot be divorced from the socio-political context and cultural policy of the time as it was the main factor in shaping traditional dance. Thus, this thesis must necessarily focus on political context in contemporary Thailand following the creation of a national culture because the cultural policies of successive governments reshaped the value and meaning of traditional court dance in different ways. After Raymond Williams, a Cultural Materialist approach is adopted to investigate the process of reconstruction of classical dance and the interrelationship between cultural policy and the evolution of traditional dance in contemporary times.

I am drawn to Raymond Williams's efforts to bring culture into modern socio-political discourse, through which I have been able to explore the transformation of classical dance and its reconstruction. In attempting to understand the cultural place of classical dance and investigate the historical-structural traditions of Thai dance, I explore the three aspects of a cultural process as defined by Williams (Williams, 1977): traditions, institutions and formations; and the dynamic interrelations between dominant, residual and emergent cultural formations. Williams argues that the concept of tradition in practice expresses the dominant and hegemonic pressures, as he points out:

What we have to see is not just 'a tradition' but a selective tradition: an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification (Williams, 1977:115)

The effective establishment of a selective tradition is dependent on formal institutions to which the formations of culture and socialisation obliquely relate. In Thailand, the two institutions mainly authorised to select and develop the tradition of Thai dance were the Fine Arts Department and the College of Dramatic Arts. These two national institutions legitimated the cultural policy and dance curriculum, which subsequently reshaped Thai dance and its value, impacting dance practices today. In this thesis, I apply the concepts of cultural system and selective tradition to analyse the hegemonic processes active in Thai traditional dance. This theory also inspires concern about the dynamic interrelations constituting the complexity of culture, which William summarises as:

In what I have called 'epochal' analysis, a cultural process is seized as a cultural system, with determinate dominant features: feudal culture or bourgeois culture or a transition from one to the other. This emphasis on dominant and definitive lineaments and features is important and often, in practice, effective. (William, 1977:121)

This term can be applied to analyse the reconstruction of Thai classical dance and its subsequent development as a conservative high art. After the 1932 revolution in Thailand, the Fine Arts Department monopolised the court arts and culture under the conservative brand of Thai identity that regards classical dance as an expression of elite values. The productions and publications of the Fine Arts Department during the period of revival constituted an emergent element in standardising dance practice and knowledge. Since then, the revived dance drama, ceremony and dance training of the Fine Arts Department have evolved as patterns of residual and emergent elements. Moreover, the initially emergent rituals and standards of dance training during 1940s and 1960s have become rather residual, as new traditions have begun to appear. This process can be viewed in relation to cultural policy of the Fine Arts Department and the higher education institution. Thus, in order to understand the modern evolution of the dance, it is important to analyse the construction of the cultural system that surrounds that dance form. In this study, I mainly analyse the three factors: socio-political context, spirituality in dance and the educational system, to understand the process of reconstruction and transformation of classical dance.

In terms of the impact of socio-political context on Thai traditional dance, this research focuses on the two periods of the reconstruction of Thai classical dance: under the post-1932 government, and in the mid-1940s after World War II. These two major periods, which align with different political contexts and cultural policy, were significant in the development of classical dance and its effect on practices today.

The first major transformation of Thai culture occurred after the revolution in 1932, when a bloodless coup changed the system of Thailand from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional democracy. The coup was lead by the People's Party (*Khana Ratsadon*), comprising a small group of civilian students and members of the military dissatisfied with the traditional system of royal supremacy. In 1934, the state founded the Fine Arts

Department and the School of Dramatic Arts as the main institutes to preserve and transmit traditional dance. All the royal arts from the Ministry of the Royal Household were transferred to these institutions. It was a crucial turning point of court and royal dance training in that it changed the patronage from the elite in the royal households, to the constitutional government in the new educational system. Since then, court dance has shifted from its initial function as entertainment for the elite and royal regalia, to supporting the state's cultural policy and serving middle-class audiences instead.

The early 1940s marked a radical change in Thai culture and performance when the government under the Prime Minister Phibun Songkhram aimed to modernise Thai society. This was consequently known as 'the Cultural Revolution in Phibun Period.' Faced with the crisis of World War II, Phibun attempted to promote nationalist ideals in order to 'civilise' the country. To support and promote the new ideology, the state promulgated a new national cultural policy in various forms such as state guidelines, laws and regulations; for example, by changing the name of country from Siam to Thailand (Land of the Free) in 1939. This policy also included laws and regulations concerning music and performance that aimed to modernise the Thai performing arts. This situation resulted in the invention of patriotic dance drama productions, which combined Thai dance with spoken plays to instil the political ideals of the new government. In terms of cultural change encountered in this period, I intend to analyse the resulting political transformation of the relationship between the court's performance traditions and national cultural policies.

The second reconfiguration of Thai culture occurred in the mid-1940s when the new government sought to change existing forms of nationalism. After World War II, the state sought to revive the status of the monarchy in order to resist the crisis of communism in Thailand (Sattyanurak, 2013:152). From 1958 to 1963, the government of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, whose regime was different to that of Phibun's,

oversaw the rebirth of Thai monarchy. The new government changed nationalist ideals by promoting traditional notions of kingship and the central place of Buddhism in Thai identity; for example, Sarit's government revived traditional royal ceremonies and Buddhist holidays. Royal performances such as *Khon* and royal dance drama became more important in supporting kingship status all over again. Moreover, traditional dance had also been promoted to reflect national identity on various occasions. This research investigates the change in the function of classical dance with the notion of Thai-ness propagated by the new government, and analyses the relationship between classical dance and the revival of the monarchy.

From the mid-1940s under the cultural policy that dictated the revival of traditional dance, the state reformed the School of Dramatic Arts. The consequential state policy in reinventing and promoting Thai traditional dance is an important theme that has emerged through the course of this research. This period witnessed the monopoly of traditional dance, which was centralised and standardised by the Fine Arts Department. Several types of dance drama were revived, and former leading dancers of different Royal household troupes were gathered and invited to train a new generation in the School of Dramatic Arts. Therefore, the Fine Arts Department and the School of Dramatic Arts had exclusive control over the performance and knowledge-production of court dance and traditional dance, which marked new forms of tradition from the mid-1940s until the present. In this study, I aim to provide a better understanding of the interrelationship between government policy, the reconstruction of classical dance, the transmission processes, and the transformation of Thai classical dance, which collectively influenced the development of traditional dance within the context of the time. I mainly focus on questions of how the state reconstructed the history of Thai classical dance, and what the influence of publication and codification by the state, which reconstructs dance-knowledge, is on the development of dance drama.

The study of classical dance cannot be divorced from spirituality, aesthetics and ideology. The element of spiritual sacredness in classical dance has been standardised in accordance with traditional beliefs as well as the state authority. Thus, dance rituals have been reconstructed and reinvented in modern times. This research also examines the question of how the state promotes the spirituality of classical dance and emphasises the value of the *Wai Khru* ceremony—a rite of paying homage to teachers—and the most sacred of dances, the *Ong Phra Phirap* dance, which focuses on the power of state to authorise the element of spirituality in dance and the reinvention of tradition in these rituals. These two rituals performed today reveal the connections between the state, the monarch, teachers, knowledge, and the spiritual world as realised through dancers. Furthermore, this also highlights the power of the state and the renewal of a sense of high art as well as the spiritual element in dance that continues to support the classical court dance until the present.

In order to understand the rituals and customs surrounding Thai dance, I lean on the concept of the invention of tradition by Eric Hobsbawm in which I argue that some traditional dance rituals, the transmission of sacredness in dance, and the *Ong Phra Phirap* dance, were reinvented by the state after the period of revival in the 1940s. In his study *The Invention of Tradition*, Hobsbawm (2015:1) notes that ‘traditions which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented’. The ‘invented tradition’ is established gradually over a long time and then is suddenly formalised. Hobsbawm (2015:1) states that invented traditions can be more or less permanent repetitious rituals—they can be new versions of old traditions—but they all tend to emerge as reactions to new situations and with reference to ‘a suitable past’. Hobsbawm especially discusses the creation of nationalism and how the modern ‘nation’ has to be understood in terms of invented traditions. He also makes a point of separating how the past is featured through the official ideology of nationalism on one hand and popular

memory on the other. This notion can be applied to analyse the process of reinvention of rituals and ceremony in Thai dance, which remains central to the beliefs of dancers.

The educational system is the most important factor in the transformation of Thai classical dance because it is the main tool that the government used for disseminating traditional dance in modern times. In the past, court dance prior to the revolution of 1932 was taught only at court or in noble houses. In 1934, after the revolution, a music and dance school was founded by the government based on the French *l'École des Beaux-Arts* and *l'Académie de Danse et Musique* (Rutnin, 1993: 189). Dancers and musicians, who used to be dancers or musicians of the departments of the royal or noble households, were transferred to the Department of Fine Arts and the School of Dramatic Arts as artists and dance masters. The formation of the national dance school in 1934 initially marked an important turning point in the dissemination of traditional dance training. In this research, thus, I investigate the relationship between dance pedagogy and traditional dance in which I focus on how the state values dance education, operates dance training to its advantage, how dance training has evolved over time, the effects of that evolution on dance perspectives and skill, and how classical dance is disseminated and placed in Thai society.

In taking this social context into consideration, I would like to investigate the functions and values of Thai classical dance, and focus on its enduring changes upon the socio-political realm, cultural policy, the monarchy as well as pedagogy, all of which, in turn, greatly influenced the transformation of Thai classical dance up to the present. The main questions of this research include: what are the values and meanings of Thai classical dance that reflect Thailand's cultural formation? How has government policy since the revolution of 1932 changed the nature of the relationship between Thai dance and the government? How has the government promoted and emphasised the value of classical

dance? What are the changes in the function of Thai dance to support tourism, and finally, what is the relationship between pedagogy and dance?

Critical Framework and Review Literature

Following my research questions, the topics and sources, which aim to answer the questions, are divided into different aspects to reflect critiques and contribute to the transformation of classical dance in Thailand. This research covers various dimensions; for instance, the treatment of time in the evolution of Thai dance: the past, present and future, in the context of the social-political ritual and belief systems, and dance transmission. In order to understand the modern dynamic of dance transformation, it is not possible to study these factors in isolation. Therefore, this research explores the intersections of all these factors which influence traditional dance today. In developing my discussion, I have sought to integrate the theoretical discourse of Thai classical dance within a wider body of literatures. The framework of literature review in this thesis includes cultural materialism, dance and nationalism, Thai-ness and Thai identities, Thai dance history, spirituality in dance and dance education.

Dance, Nationalism and Identity

There are many studies about the role of the government in the promotion and the reconstruction of national dances. As Reed (1998: 511) points out, ‘Dance is a powerful tool in shaping nationalist ideology and in the creation of national subjects, often more so than political rhetoric or intellectual debates’. In this aspect, I draw upon the studies of Yvonne Payne Daniel in *Changing Values in Cuban Rumba: a Lower Class Black Dance Appropriated by the Cuban Revolution* (1991); Ramsey’s essay in *Vodou, Nationalism and Performance: the Staging of Folklore in Mid- Twentieth Century Haiti* (1997); Reed in *Dance and Nation: Performance, Ritual, and Politics in Sri Lanka* (2010). These studies are useful to understand the power of the state in the construction

of traditional dance and nationalism in different areas. Throughout this study, I use the relationship between dance, state and nationalist ideology to analyse the shift of Thai traditional dance after state patronage.

In developing my understanding of the complex process of creating national dance, I have also utilised Ruth Hellier-Tinoco's study *Embodying Mexico: Tourism, Nationalism & Performance*. This study shows how the shaping of authentication, embodiment, and ideology re-functions to construct the culture and dance repertoires engaging with political power. Her work illustrates the complex process of the state agenda in tourism and nationalism after the post-revolutionary 1920s. Hillier-Tinoco (2001) argues that nationalist and tourism policies and ideologies, particularly those associated with constructing notions of folklore, have had profound effects on the performance, dissemination, and interpretation of these expressive practices. Hilier-Tinoco's study is interesting in the way it argues that 'the state is not just a monolithic 'state' but is an ongoing 'project' of statehood, and that the individual people that are the agents of the state are very influential in formulating what stands for the state'. I apply her concept to analyse the change in cultural policy across different governments and its impact on the transformation of Thai dance.

Likewise, Hughes-Freeland's study (2008) *Embodied Communities Dance Traditions and Change in Java*, contributes two perspectives: dance politics and the cultural interpretation of movement, and explores dance in relation to social and cultural change in the national state. It has thus been very relevant for my research. Freeland argues that:

Dance communities and the roles and representations of dancers and dances have been implicated in changing discourses of colonialism and nationalism, particularly in the construction of history and 'authenticity', which in turn produce changes and innovations in particular and cultures (Freeland, 2008:12).

This study examines how dance traditions and practices have become involved in social interactions, and thus generate a sense of identity. Freeland emphasises that court dance has undergone a process of debate, positioning and emergence in national cultural politics. From the viewpoint of these studies, I employ the term ‘cultural construction’ as a means to understand Thai traditional dance as a manifestation of national culture.

Another discussion that has illuminated my understanding of dance and the nation is Kelly M. Askew on *Performing the Nation Swahili Music and Cultural Politic in Tanzania* (2002). She elaborates on the way in which nation building impacted upon the transformation of musical performance in Tanzania. Askew (2002:24) focuses on the complexity of power and musical performances applied to multiple levels of social life, from individual levels to the national level. She argues that musical performance becomes one of the most crucial processes of imagining a nation, especially in relation to cultural policy. This study has made significant contributions to my own work on culture and the construction of national identities; particularly, the politics of culture which are related to the transformation of performance.

In regard to the terms of the ‘codification’ of dance history, an important source text for this thesis has been the work of Erdman ‘Dance Discourse: Rethinking the History of the ‘Oriental Dance’ in the book *Moving Words: Re-writing Dance* (1996). She critically analyses the ways in which western ideas of nationalism have influenced the construction of Indian dance history. Erdman (1996:294) also notes in terms of deconstructing and reconstructing history, ‘Scholarship on Indian dance has moved from textual explorations and descriptive accounts of dance genres to sharp and sometimes bitter indigenous Indian critiques charging sexism and misrepresentation in the recreation of India’s classical dance traditions.’

Likewise, the chapter ‘Destabilising the Discipline: Critical Debates about History and their Impact on the Study of Dance’ written by Alexandra Carter (2004) in the book *Rethinking Dance History: a Reader*, highlights some of the theoretical issues that dance scholars have raised in regard to dance reconstruction and preservation. As Carter (2004:14) points, ‘Historians make meaning; we need to be aware of who is making the meaning and from what perspective that meaning is made’. These two studies inspire me to rethink the history of Thai dance and how it shaped understandings of Thai classical dance. I apply this concept of ‘rethinking history’ to deeply analyse the process of how dance history was reconstructed by the Thai state after the classical revival period.

In terms of the transformation of traditional dance from past to the present, I draw upon the book edited by Theresa Buckland, *Dancing the Past in the Present: Nation, Culture, Identities*, which has been an important source for providing a dance ethnography framework that reflects upon historical issues within dance practices from various case studies. A remarkable text for me is Buckland’s ‘Dance History, and Ethnography Frameworks, Sources and Identities of Past to Present’. Buckland provides the theoretical and methodological frameworks for dance study which presents the notion of interrelations between ethnographic and historic methods. These methods are located across disciplines such as anthropology, ethnology, cultural studies, social and cultural history, performance studies, sociology, ethnomusicology and folklore studies (Buckland, 2006:4). Buckland also suggests that:

the study of dance as representative practice requires the skills and perspectives of history and ethnography, not only to explore legacies of colonialism and nationalism, but also to interrogate the continuing impact of globalization and the politics of identity articulation’ (Buckland, 2006:17).

I lean on this theory of the combination of dance ethnography and dance history as part of my research methodology to analyse the transformation of classical dance in Thailand.

Some Studies on Thai Classical Dance and Thai Theatre

There is little published research available about Thai classical dance and its transformation after the period of revolution of 1932, particularly in the period of the 1940s. Most previous research has repeatedly concentrated on the development of Thai classical dance under the period of the monarchy. Those aspects of research are insufficient for analysing the social functions of Thai classical dance, its value as well as its transformation in the period from 1932 to the present. Undeniably, the transformation of Thai classical dance has been influenced by the socio-political development of the Thai nation state. There has been tension between the state which, on the one hand, wants to preserve classical dance as a part of Thai identity, and the dynamic nature of dance itself, on the other, which is always changing. The social-political development of the Thai nation state has also been the key context in explaining the continuity and preservation of, or changes in, Thai classical dance. Therefore, I aim to fill that gap with this thesis, and I begin by analysing and evaluating the literature regarding social and political aspects, cultural control and hierarchy among Thai dancers; factors which have affected change in Thai classical dance.

Mattani Rutnin's PhD thesis was an essential study in the development of Thai dance drama and Thai theatre in the modern age. In her book entitled *Dance, Drama, and Theatre in Thailand: The Process of Development and Modernization* (1993), Rutnin furthered her study of the development of Thai theatre. This book shows how social, economic and political factors affected the development of traditional dance, dance drama and Thai theatre throughout its long history. Her insightful and thorough study

in this book describes the origin of Thai dance from the pre-Sukhothai period and the significance of development of dance drama in the reign of each King. Rutnin also discusses the modernisation of Thai dance drama during the reigns of King Rama V as timely adaptations of western elements and revival of classical dance drama in the reign of King Rama VI (1868-1916). She acknowledges the impact of the revolution in 1932 on dance drama and theatre, summarising that ‘It is precisely this change in the structure of administration that caused the change in the nature of classical dance drama, in that educational values and purposes have become the essence of all arts engaged in in some degree of public entertainment’ (Rutnin, 1993:189); however, she provides little evidence to support this investigation.

The other most comprehensive and detailed development of Thai dance and theatre undertaken in a historical context has been Suraphon Virulrak’s research *Evolution of Thai Dance and Dance Drama in the Bangkok Period Between 1782-1935* (2004). This research focusses on the origins and development of various Thai theatrical forms, both court and folk, in relation to social, economic and cultural changes during the first seven reigns of the Rattanaosin period. He explains the impact of social and cultural factors, such as population, transportation, architecture, economics, literary composition, and ceremonies, so as to show how each category of dance drama originated and developed. Firstly, he notes the impact of the abilities, knowledge and tastes of the monarch and royal policy, upon dance drama. Secondly, the royal customs and rituals were important factors in maintaining and supporting traditional dance because the dance was an indispensable part of those ceremonies. Thirdly, the royal policy of King Rama V, regarding the abolishment of the servant system in Thailand—wherein the servants performed a variety of duties, including court dance, without payment—resulted in dance troupes, which consisted of those who formerly worked as servants, disbanding due to lack of royal and aristocratic patronage. The other factors included the

commercialisation in the competition of the public theatre productions, the large number of casino theatres as places to interact and the creation of new theatres to attract the audiences. Moreover, the intercultural community and westernisation were mainly influential in propelling the emergence of a hybrid theatre. The liberation of women and their performances in public consequently changed the traditional dynamics of gender due to which, in the past, women were allowed to perform only at court. According to Virulrak, due to a change in law that allowed female dance troupes to perform in public, more women performed outdoors, and dance drama rapidly developed as a result. In addition, the innovation in the music was also influential in the evolution of *dance* drama as the tune was important to identify the particular form of dance drama (Virulrak, 2004: 374-375). All these factors from this study are useful for me to understand the evolution of Thai dance drama before the revolution of 1932 because they depict the creative diversity of the dance practice before it was standardised and preserved as ‘tradition’.

The other important source text by Suraphon Virulrak has been *The Performing Arts in the Reign of King Rama IX* (2006), which builds on his previous research. This research studies the status of performing arts, all genres of theatre and dance, seen in Thailand during the period of King Rama IX (1946-1999). He analyses Thai performing arts through four main topics: the relationship between King Rama IX and performing arts, performing arts education, types of productions, and creative dance in dance set pieces. Virulrak points out that the present King, Bhumibol Adulyadej, still plays an important role to support and patronise Thai dance in various roles, such as philosopher, artist, and spiritual power. Virulrak also provides comparisons between the different performing arts curricula at the university level and the new creative dance pieces during this period. This work is very useful for me to understand the overview of development of Thai dance and the whole picture of performing arts education in the

higher level in the present day; however, this study focusses only on the role of monarchy in providing patronage for Thai dance which abandons the role of the state and cultural policy; the other great factor impacting the evolution of Thai classical dance, which I discuss in this thesis.

In terms of understanding the mechanism of Thai classical dance, I have drawn upon Nidhi Eoseewong's book chapter (1991) entitled 'The Performance and Communication and the Future'. It focusses on communication in performance, and how the social context influences performance and predict Thai performance. Eoseewong states that the government used Thai classical dance as representative of Thai national performance which was from elite and royal taste, in spite of the fact that on the periphery, the non-elites had their own cultural lifestyles and indigenous art forms which differed from region to region. This is the reason why Thai classical dance was not popular and was not appreciated by all Thai people (Eoseewong, 1991:160). Moreover, he suggests that the Fine Arts Department, the College of Dramatic Arts and the dance institutes can preserve the ancient form of performance as though it were a museum piece. However, the creativity in Thai classical dance was regulated by those institutes; as a result, Thai dance was not as dramatically developed as it used to be. This is a useful point of departure in my thinking in the creativity of Thai classical dance and its evaluation after traditional dance was patronised by the State. Although Eoseewong raises the interesting point of the connection of the state and the rigidity of Thai performance, he does not present formal evidence to support his discussion.

The other interesting study by Eoseewong is the book entitled *Pen & Sail: Literature and History in Early Bangkok* (2005). In this study, Eoseewong traces interrelationships between court and popular literary conventions that reflect upon the socio-economical and socio-political context in the era of 'Old Siam' in 1767-1855. More specifically in attempting to understand Thai classical dance's identity and practice, Eoseewong

identifies the differences between folk and court styles in Thai dance more broadly. From these sources, I apply the term ‘classical’ not only in reference to the internal development of Thai classical dance but also as a means to understand the nature of Thai classical patterns.

In terms of cultural changes after the revolution, Jiraporn Wittayasakpan’s dissertation, *Nationalism and the Transformation of Aesthetic Concept: Theatre in Thailand during the Phibun period* (1992), has provided an important socio-political framework in the period of the revolution of 1932. This source text discusses the nationalist ideology of Thai leaders that had a great impact on theatrical forms. She points out that Thai theatre underwent significant changes in form, content, and aesthetics during this period. Two particularly important factors in the transformation of Thai aesthetic concepts were the establishment of the Fine Arts Department and the rise in popularity of Luang Wichit’s nationalist plays. The Fine Arts Department was authorised to certify the standards of Thai Theatre by issuing rules and regulations concerning music and theatrical performances. This source details changes in Thai Theatre during the Cultural Revolution in the early 1940s; however, she does not provide any details about Thai classical dance and the way in which it was affected by that government policy.

In my discussion, I would like to identify the influence of cultural policy on dance creativity after the establishment of the Office of Performing Art under the Fine Arts Department. Useful context in understanding the background of Fine Arts Department during the revolution period emerges in *Thai Entertainment Culture Between 1948-1957* (2007) by Patravadi Phuchadaphirom. She suggests that the elite background of the committee members responsible for the project of improving the Office of Performing Arts, affected the preservation of Thai performing arts in a way that emphasised merely royal theatre. In terms of the change of Thai entertainment and government cultural policy, Phuchadaphirom provides useful evidence to show how the

government supported classical performances. However, her research mainly focuses on change across all categories of Thai entertainment, and only briefly details traditional dance.

I have also found the notion of the transmission of Thai classical dance in the dissertation written by Rojana Suntharanont (2006), *the Directory of Dance Artists: Transmission of Dance under the Fine Arts Department*. This study has informed the discussion of the transmission of Thai classical dance, providing a rich history that is pertinent in understanding the field of Thai classical dance lineage before revolution of 1932. She also points out that the dance transmission process involves wholly imitating and strictly following the teacher, which leads to preserving intact a dance style up until the present. Her work has proved to be helpful in tracking the lineages of dance teachers in different royal households, and their experiences in dance training, in analysing traditional dance in ancient times before it was under government support.

Thai-ness and Thai Identity

The most important factor in analysing the evolution of traditional dance after the revolution of 1932 is the social-political context, especially the consequences of social change from Siam to the new Thai nation. With regards to the complex process of contributing to Thai national identity, the book *National Identity and Its Defenders: Thailand, 1939-1989* edited by Craig J. Reynolds and *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* by Thongchai Winichakul (1998) are useful sources to understand social change from Siam to the modernisation of Thailand. These sources reveal the foundation of the construction of Thai national ideology which affected the social function of traditional court dance after the revolution of 1932.

In terms of the structure of Thai-ness, Saichol Sattayanurak has written many useful source texts, which are based on his research on the history of Thai intellectuals in Thai

society and culture between 1892 and 1992. His study synthesises the construction of ‘Thai-ness’ through a number of mainstream intellectuals who have profoundly influenced Thai society and culture. His work has helped me analyse four main intellectuals who have influenced the construction of dance knowledge and raised the value of Thai dance in modern Thai society: Prince Damrong Rajanubhap, who was known as the father of Thai history, was the first person to write a highly influential dance history; Lung Wichit Wattakan who was the first General Director of the Fine Arts Department and established the School of Dramatic Arts in 1934, and was also the most important figure in the establishment of Thai national identity in the modernisation of Thailand; Phraya Auman Rajadhon who was the second General Director of the Fine Arts Department and a major scholar who authorises in Thai culture and M.R. Kukrit Promoj who was a remarkable royalist, scholar, journalist, and politician who attempted not only to promote ‘royalism’ to increase its power in Thai society but also to restore the value of classical dance to its original position as a valued ‘high art’ in Thai society. Sattayanurak’s study emphasises that the discourse on ‘Thai-ness’ which established by those intellectuals is still profound in Thai society today because it is repeatedly propagated through the media and the state educational system.

The other useful source to analyse the status of Thai dance in modern times is ‘Thai Middle-class Practice and Consumption of Traditional Dance: “Thai-ness” and High art’ by Paritta Chalernpow Koanantakool, published in *Local Cultures and the New Asia: The State, Culture, and Capitalism in Southeast Asia* (2002). This article explores the role of the Thai middle class in the adaption of Thai classical dance for amateur practitioners in evaluating notions of Thai-ness and the value of high art. Chalernpow focuses on the emergence of the middle class in Thai society in the mid-1980s when Thailand became a new industrialised country. The middle class consisted of a new group of wealthy people whose lifestyle relied on the consumption of luxury goods.

This article analyses Thai classical dance and dance practice as the new consumption of Thai middle class wherein it was served as cultural capital sanctioned by the state. Chalermpraw argues that the new middle class was not only interested in Thai dance so as to embody Thai-ness, but also to emulate the life style of the old elites by portraying themselves to be guardians of Thai classical dance which is represented as a high art.

Some Studies in Spirituality in Dance and the *Wai Khru* Ceremony

Little research exists on the ritual of *Wai Khru* in Thai dance. One that is particularly significant for my research is a Masters thesis entitled *The Master of Ceremony's Dances in the Rite of Paying Homage to the Teachers of Khon and Lakhon*, by Pramate Boonyachai (1997), a renowned dance scholar. His research focus on the seven dance pieces of the master of the *Wai Khru* ceremony performed during the ritual, and the history of the royal line of dance masters of the *Wai Khru* ceremony. In this study, Boonyachai presents idealised descriptions of the *Wai Khru* dance and analyses the ritual's many particularities by comparing the procedures of *Wai Khru* presided over by different masters from 1971 to 1997. This thesis helped me understand the history of the *Wai Khru* ceremony and the lineage of masters in the royal line. However, this study does not investigate the socio-political contexts of the *Wai Khru* ceremony, the state authority and the King's intervention, which I will discuss in this thesis.

The other influential source on the *Wai Khru* ceremony is *Sounding the Center History and Aesthetic in Thai Buddhist Performance* (2001) by Deborah Wong. Wong analyses the *Wai Khru* ceremony as a performance and her study focusses on how 'the connections between kings, teachers, knowledge, and performance form a network of power exchange and renewal that continues to impel the classical court arts.' (2001: xvvi) The main focus of her research is the *Wai Khru* music ceremony and the transmission of the music. This study offers valuable information about the perspective

of *Wai Khru* in its attempt to connect ancient beliefs, the Thai-nation state, the King and the social system in Thailand. I draw upon the gap in her discussion of state power to demonstrate the state authority in the construction of Thai classical belief and the dissemination of *Wai Khru* in Thai society. I also investigate the reinvented tradition of the transmission of the most sacred dance, *Ong Phra Phirap* Dance, which she does not discuss in her study.

State and Dance Education

In the context of state power in performance education, I regard the study of Shannon Jackson in *Professing Performance* as vital to understand the impact of education on the change of performance. This study scrutinises the ways of placing performance studies and its theory under the context of the institutional history of performance in the US Academy. Jackson explores how performance was placed in the institute and explores the role of arts and humanities in higher education. Jackson analyses the relationship of past institutional history and the current artistic and scholarly practices in theatrical performance. I apply this debate to my work in an attempt to analyse the changes in traditional dance training under the new educational system and examine the history of traditional dance study in the national dance academy.

Additionally Benjamin Brinner's (1995) *Knowing Music Making Music: Javanese Gamelan and the Theory of Musical Competence and Interaction*, is very useful for dance education analysis, particularly the authority of the state. In this study, Brinner mainly investigates the development of multiple musical competences and their transformation through time. Brinner considers the role of educational system in the formation and alteration of competences in the twentieth century. He states that the educational institution and political agendas have shaped the study of Javanese music (Brinner, 1995:10). I have adapted this concept to examine the shifts in Thai dance

pedagogy which are mainly influenced by the state in the centralisation of dance education.

Research Methodology

The research methodology applies both historical research and ethnographic methods which include the researcher's own experience in dance training as a dancer and dance teacher for several years. The main data in this research has been gathered from documentary records, interviews and fieldwork in Thailand. The documentary research was carried out both in Thailand and the UK; specifically, the University of Exeter and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London at the centre for South East Asia. However, the archival research was mostly conducted at the National Archive and National Library in Thailand. The interviews were also conducted in Thailand, in Thai, and have been translated by the researcher.

The historical research of this study draws from various primary sources; for example, the government documents including the government record in the establishment of The Fine Arts Department after the revolution of 1932, The Royal Decree of the Cultural Determination for the Theatre Art 1942, the project to establish the Office of Performing Arts in 1946, and the minutes of the Fine Arts Department. The primary sources also include published documents, newspapers and magazines, the programs of performances as well as the photographs and records of dance productions produced by The Fine Arts Department, and so on.

My research fieldwork in Thailand lasted nine months, and was divided into periods from July to September 2013, in June 2014, from November 2014 to January 2015 and from March to April 2016. During several short term spells of field work in Thailand, I had the opportunity to observe and participate in three *Wai Khru* ceremonies which had different purposes and were on varying scales. I first observed the annual *Wai Khru*

ceremony held in June 2014, arranged by the Fine Arts Department for dance artists in the Office of Performing Arts at the National Theatre. This ceremony was the biggest and most official *Wai Khru* ceremony in Bangkok, and open to the public. The second *Wai Khru* ceremony I attended was the annual *Wai Khru* for amateur dance students arranged by Art Association for Youth, Office of National Culture Commission. It was held in March 2016 at the Thailand Cultural Centre. In this event, I not only observed the ceremony but also participated as ‘cover’. Finally, by the end of March 2016, I observed a *Wai Khru* ceremony called the *Khumnab Khru* for first-time students who begin learning dance at the College of Dramatic Arts.

During fieldwork, I have participated in many Thai performances produced by different organisers; for example, the state productions by the Office of Performing Arts, the Fine Arts Department which were mainly performed at the National Theatre and Sangkrit Sala, the commercial *Khon* at the Sala Chalerkrung Royal Theatre, the annual royal *Khon* performance at the Thailand Cultural Center, and the senior performance project at the Bunditpatanasilpa Institute, as well as many several Thai events promoting Thai culture. I also had an opportunity to participate in many seminars about Thai dance which were arranged by the Fine Arts Department and the dance institutes in Bangkok. In terms of dance pedagogy, I observed several dance classes both in high school level and at the university level. The main observations were in the Dramatic Arts College and the Buditpattanasilpa Institute which are the main training institutes for traditional dance in Thailand. All these experiences helped to contextualise the change in function of Thai dance, and the development of traditional dance and the dance academy in contemporary times.

Interviewees in this research were selected according to their engagement with classical dance from the early 1940s to the present. To understand the dynamics of dance transformation, the interviews were divided into four different categories: expertly

trained senior dance teachers and national artists, performing and teaching from 1932 to the present; dance teachers who currently teach at the College of Dramatic Arts, and at the Department of Dance in Bunditpatanasilpa; Masters of *Wai Khru* ceremony and dancers who are involved in performing the *Ong Phra Phirap* dance officially and unofficially; and dance artists in the Office of Performing Arts, the Fine Arts Department who are involved in classical dance drama. All the interviews were conducted in Thailand by myself, and some were additionally conducted online while I was in Exeter. The interviewees are listed below:

1. The senior dance teachers and national artists

- 1.1. Suwannee Chalanukhro
- 1.2. Rachana Pungprayong
- 1.3. Associate Prof. Chanthana Iamsakul
- 1.4. Noppharat Wangnaitham
- 1.5. Boonnak Tantranon
- 1.6. Nongyua Amrunpongwattana

2. Dance teachers in the College of Dramatic Arts and Bunditpatanasilpa Institute

- 2.1 Dr. Chanai Vannalee
- 2.2 Assitant Prof. Kwanjai Kongthaworn
- 2.3 Associate Prof.Dr. Jintana Saitongkum
- 2.4 Chalemchai Piromrak
- 2.5 Pramjai Pengsuk

3. Master of *Wai Khru* ceremony and Dancer who received the right to perform *Ong Phra Phirap* both officially and unofficially.

- 3.1 Sombati Kaewsujarit
- 3.2 Dr.Chulachart Aranyanak

3.3 Captain Dr. Akarin Pongpandecha

3.4 Tada Vithauapul

3.5 Thakoon Samranpong

3.6 Dr.Kerdsiri Noknoi

4. Dance artists in the Office of Performing Arts, the Fine Arts Department

4.1 Dr. Pairoj Thongkumsuk

4.2 Dr.Treeradach Klinchan

4.3 Akkanun Phantoorak

4.4 Julsub Doungpattra

Organisation of the Dissertation

This research is divided into 4 chapters. Chapter One, ‘Nationalism, Cultural policy and Traditional dance: 1932-1945’ aims to discuss the development of Thai dance and theatre from 1932 to 1945 when political power shifted from absolute monarchy to democracy. I focus on the question of social-political impact on court dance when court dance transformed into the new nation under state patronage and management. I argue that everything changed when the state and educational system replaced the courts as the performers’ primary patrons. In order to understand the transformation and transmission process, I investigate the background of political change and the patronage of the court dance before the revolution of 1932. In addition, the foundation of the national dance school and how it impacted the transmission of dance practices and its curricula will be analysed.

Moreover, I evaluate Luang Wichit’s role as the first General Director of the Fine Arts Department, who founded the Academy of Dance and Music. I analyse his vision and idea to develop court dance both in dance pedagogy and in dance style. As the main tasks of the court masters and students from the Fine Arts Department involved

performing for the presentation of Thai culture, this chapter also focuses on the production of The Fine Arts Department during this period of 1932-1945. I analyse the nationalist plays of Luang Wichit, which invented a new theatrical form to disseminate nationalism, using dramatic elements from both western and Thai classical dance, focusing upon how classical dance was adapted into the new Thai theatre. It is interesting to note that these nationalist dance plays of Luang Wichit have been preserved and taught as part of amateur dance training from then until the present. Moreover, I analyse the impact of Cultural Revolution in Phibun period (1938-1944), how the regulation of cultural policy set by the government was scrutinised by focusing on the edict of cultural control, and 'The Royal Decree of the Cultural Determination for the Theatre Arts 1942' which limited and controlled the performance. I discuss how this policy affects Thai classical dance.

Chapter Two, 'Reconstruction of Thai Classical Dance', focuses on the transformation of court dance in the political and cultural context of Thai in the late nineteenth century, when the Fine Arts Department revived Thai classical dance which began the process of defining classicalism. The main purpose of this chapter is to contextualise how the government reconstructed the history of the dance, when rising Thai nationalism stimulated the redefinition of Thai classical dance as a national heritage. During this period, the state directly intervened in the transformation of classical dance, becoming the most powerful patron by establishing the Office of Performing Arts to propagate classical dance drama. The power of state when the Fine Arts Department was solely responsible for performing classical dance at the National Theatre and official occasions will be analysed. Furthermore, this chapter also considers the publications about classical dance drama, the development of history of Thai classical dance when the Fine Arts Department propagated knowledge of Thai classical dance and theatre to people and what people understood by classical dance. How the history of Thai dance became

formalised and how those sources operated and set the standard of Thai dance knowledge will be discussed.

Moreover, my interest is in understanding how the Fine Arts Department defined and emphasised the value of classical dance, *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance dramas, in highlighting the identification of classical dance. I focus on the Fine Arts Department's productions and programs which later resulted in the codification of dance drama genres. During this period of revival dance drama, there were many reinventions of classical dance drama, arriving at the present form of Thai theatre. I analyse a production of the Fine Arts Department *Manohra* as an example to understand the method of creating dance drama before it was preserved and taught to new generations. This knowledge from this chapter will provide the groundwork for an analysis of classical dance and its transmission in chapters Three and Four

Chapter Three 'A Consideration of spirituality in Classical Dance' explores the *Wai Khru* ceremony as a tool that the state used to regulate and standardise Thai classical dance. This chapter mainly focusses on the state power in the *Wai Khru* ceremony after the Fine Arts Department arranged the first official rite of paying homage to teachers in 1945 and development in 1946. I investigate how the state constructed the ritual through words, writing about the ceremony, and the enactment of ritual itself which constructs dancers' beliefs. I trace a succession of the masters of the ceremony and also discuss how important this ceremony is to dance artists. Furthermore, the relationship between royalty and the power of the *Wai Khru* ceremony and how the King played an important role in supporting Thai classical dance will be analysed. This chapter also analyses the authority of the State in the invention of passing on the *Ong Phra Phirap* dance, which is regarded as the most significant dance in the *Wai Khru* ceremony. I will focus on the question how the monarchy and the state have immense power in setting the standard for traditional dance. To discuss the state intervention in passing on the *Ong Phra*

Phirap dance, I will trace two versions of the *Ong Phra Phirap* dance: the royal version and an unofficial version.

Chapter Four titled ‘State and Education in Thai Dance’ examines the role and the result of state patronage and promotion of Thai classical dance, focusing on dance pedagogy as the instrument which the state used to preserve and transmit classical dance to new generations. This chapter focusses on the question of how classical dance has been maintained and changed under the new educational system. I argue that the main factor in aiding further development of traditional dance and altering forms of classical dance creativity is the new system of dance pedagogy. In this chapter, I also investigate the way in which the state dance version—revived in the 1940s—was established and has been transmitted to new generations, and how it claimed its power and influence over the folk dances of Thailand. The chapter will describe the development of the state-empowered form of dance that has become synonymous with classical dance, and the dissemination of this dance across curricula.

Chapter 1

Nationalism, Cultural Policy and Traditional Dance: 1932-1945

The study of traditional dance cannot be divorced from its history and social-political context because once social and cultural traditions are changed, the function and value of dance are undoubtedly affected. Therefore, in order to understand Thai classical dance and its transformation, it is important to consider the wide diversity of cultures, especially after the revolution of 1932 which marked the start of a new era in Thailand. Throughout the history of Thai dance, classical dance before the revolution was directly controlled and created by patrons and sponsors, such as the King, members of royal family, the aristocracy, or nobility (Prasertsud, 1998: 62). However, when Thailand changed from an absolute monarchy to constitutional government in 1932, the monarch was no longer the patron of the royal arts. This role of the patron of Thai traditional dance was assumed by members of the new government, who had different objectives in promoting Thai culture.

It is central to my argument to emphasise the impact of the social-political context on traditional dance when it transformed under new patronage and management by the government, after the revolution of 1932. The coup in 1932 contributed to the process of nation-building and state formation that led to a remarkable decline in royal authority including in dance patronage. In this context, it can be said that the political change marked the end of court performance. This chapter attempts to present cultural influences and contexts, and social-political events, which have all influenced Thai traditional dance. I analyse the development, new organisation and functions as well as the new genre of Thai theatre in which court dance styles were adapted and simplified to serve government policy.

The purpose of this chapter is therefore to provide the background for the examination of the change of traditional dance after revolution of 1932. The first section is about the different organisations that dealt with court dance when it was under government control,

focussing on the post-coup role of performing arts and on the introduction of the Fine Arts Department and the School of Dramatic Arts. Both were new organisations of court dance which have subsequently become important institutes to preserve and produce Thai classical dance. The second section analyses how the classical dance was adapted to serve the new nationalism policy focussing on a new mode of performance which was created and performed by The Fine Arts Department. This new form of performance had nationalist content and was a hybrid form combining western and Thai features, which later become a new genre of Thai theatre. The third section scrutinises the impact of the Cultural Revolution during the period of 1938 to 1944 under the Prime Minister Field Marshal Plaek Phibun Songkhram, which was known as the Phibun period; a period of radical change in Thai culture. I discuss the regulation of cultural policy set by the government, focusing on the edict of cultural control, 'The Royal Decree of the Cultural Determination for the Theatre Arts 1942' which limited and controlled performances. I analyse how this policy affected Thai dance and how classical dance was composed to serve popular audiences. I argue that this period of revolution marked a significant change in Thai traditional dance, especially in its function to support the cultural policy of the state.

Thailand from Absolute Monarchy to Democracy

Before analysing the dance transformation and the change of traditional dance during the revolution period (1932-1945), we must consider the social-political context which has influenced the function and value of court dance. This is because political power changed when the King and royal family no longer supported Thai court dance. In order to pave the way for a better comprehension of the cultural system and how it impacted upon dance transformation, this section provides a brief overview of political change in Thai society.

Thailand, previously named Siam, was governed under an absolute monarchy until 24 June 1932 when the People's Party (Khana Ratsadon) overthrew the power of King Rama VII (King Prajadhipok) (1925-1935), replacing the monarchy under a democratic constitution. The members of the People's Party were comprised of Thai elites, famous intellectuals, civilian students who studied in Europe and England, and military representatives who were appointed to high-ranking army officers during the period 1910-1925. They were dissatisfied with the traditional system of royal supremacy, which then led to the coup. The new political leader, the People's Party, desired to change the unfair system which led to the aristocracy exploiting ordinary people, and aimed at making justice a priority. Public resentment related to practical issues such as taxation, the neglect of public interest and the nepotism prevalent in high office positions (Jumbala, 1992:20-21). Moreover, the new government also encouraged the rise of nationalism and constitutionalism in Thailand in order to escape from the troubles caused by the western powers and to resist the invasion of communism (Mektrirat, 1992: 52).

Indeed, the manifestation of nationalism was not new in Thailand. The idea of national identity and nationalism in Thailand first emerged at the beginning of the 1850s, during the reign of King Rama V, and were heavily contributed to by King Rama VI (Dhiravegin,1985: 1-2). However, the King's idea of nationalism was different from the ideas of the new political leader, in that the King intended to strengthen the monarchical institution with the monarch as head of state (Witayasakpan, 1992: 72), whereas, the nationalist ideology that led to the coup in 1932 emphasised the significance of the nation rather than the monarchy (Prasertsud, 1998: 78-79).

During the first period of the revolution, there was a radical shift in the power of the King as the role of monarchy was substituted under the constitution. The new state attempted to change the traditional belief in the monarchy as the highest institution of the country

to one that respected the constitution instead (Prasertsud, 1998: 80). As a result of political change, classical dance, which used to be patronised by the royal family and the aristocracy, was moved under the government support. I argue that this period was witness to the initial change in function of Thai court dance, wherein it was framed post-revolution as Thai classical dance that was in service of Thai identity and nation.

Classical Dance Patronage before the Revolution

In order to understand the change in dance patronage, this section provides a brief historical background of dance masters and their troupes before they were transferred to the new state organisation, the Fine Arts Department. Dance masters who taught for the Fine Arts Department came from two related organisations of classical dance drama: the Royal Household, and the Royal Entertainment Department under the Ministry of the Royal Palace. Rutnin (1982:15) states that both of these two organisations overlapped to some extent because their dancers were connected, either by kingship or by relations between master and pupil.

What follows is an introduction to the history of court dance organisations. Historically, royal court dance first emerged in the Ayuthaya period, during the reign of King Baromakot (1732-1758) and then maintained its role as the central dance drama in Thai society. Royal court dance was mainly performed for the pleasure of the monarch and for royal ceremonies. In the past, court dancers were retainers, inner court ladies or minor members of the royal household, and some of them were daughters of rich or elite families who were sent to court to train in accordance with the graceful lifestyle of royalty. At court training, the royal dancers were not only trained in dance and music but also in all other arts of the royal court, including carving fruit, arranging flowers, cooking, and literature in preparation as women who would ascend the ranks of royalty (Rutnin, 1982:10). From the Ayuthaya period to the reign of King Rama III (King Phra Nang

Klao), a royal law restricted the royal dance troupe from employing female performers of dance drama, whereas private dance troupes outside the court were only allowed to employ male dancers. However, this law was later repealed in the Royal Decree of the King Rama IV (Rutnin, 1993:62), and brought about an increasing number of female dance troupes outside the royal court.

Toward the period from 1852 to 1868 during the reign of King Rama IV (King Mongkut), the nature of court dance drama began to change when theatrical performance was less regulated. The Royal Decree of the King Rama IV in 1855 was issued, granting permission to private dance troupes to allow women performers as part of their troupe. As mentioned earlier in the introduction, this law also allowed women to perform in public. The King Rama IV decree, lastly, also allowed consorts and inner court ladies to leave royal service and live outside the Royal Palace (Rutnin, 1993: 168). Consequently, royal dancers and teachers had an opportunity to train and teach in other private dance troupes outside the court. This was the most important turning point in the dissemination of classical dance style outside the court and in increasing the number of royal household dance troupes in Thai society¹.

By the end of the 1860s, Thai classical dance witnessed yet another crisis because of western influence and modernisation in Thailand. A key event was the establishment of a western style of theatre belonging to the elites, or noblemen. This resulted in elite dance troupes who did not just perform for their pleasure anymore, but for profit instead. As a result of competition in the business of theatre, each theatre attempted to create an individual style of dance drama in order to attract audiences. The first and most famous commercial theatre was Prince Theatre of Chao Phraya Mahin, which first created a new, hybrid form of dance drama called *Lakhon Phanthang*.

¹ According to Price Damrong Rajanubhab in *Tumnan Lakhon Inao*, there were more than twenty famous dance troupes both in Bangkok and in the province (Rajanubhab, 1923: 204-210).

During the fifth reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868-1911), there was no court dance training in the palace as social change and the creation of a royal policy in abolition of servant enslavement led to the gradual decline of the tradition of noble dance troupes. Virulrak (1999: 74) states that the King's policy regarding the abolishment of the servant class resulted in the disbandment of nobleman's dance troupes; the cost for maintaining a dance troupe increased because some dancers used to be free labourers of the theatre. The dance troupes who were maintained, consequently, had to perform commercially on a regular basis. One of the most well-known theatre houses in this period was the Dukdumban Theater of Chao Phraya Thewet which presented a new form of theatre called *Lakhon Dukdamban*, which combined opera and classical Thai dance. Moreover, the King himself preferred to watch performances at the theatre house than in the palace; therefore, he no longer funded his own all-women dance troupe but opened his royal patronage to all elite dance drama troupes and contributed to their development.

Many scholars (Rutnin, 1993; Virulrak, 2004) regard the reign of King Rama VI (King Vajiravudh (1910-1925), as a 'Golden Era of Thai theatre' because of the King's active support of the arts with the continued the royal patronage of dance. The King established the Department of Entertainment and the Fine Arts Department within the Ministry of the Royal Palace with the purpose of preserving and developing traditional Thai art in particular court cultural forms (Barme, 1993: 114). At the time, the Department of Entertainment and the Fine Arts Department were separate sections. The King also elevated the social statuses of dancers by granting leading noble titles in order to encourage public appreciation of Thai performing arts (Rutnin, 1993:162, Virulrak: 2004: 279-281).

The King also established a special school called Rongrian Thahan Krabi Luang, and later promoted the status of the school to Rongrian Phran Luang Nai Phra Barom Rachupatham (School of Royal Scouts under Royal Patronage), to train children from various social

backgrounds in education, military training and the art of classical dance drama (Rutnin, 1993: 170). The purpose of the school was: 1) to provide training for traditional *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance drama, Thai music, Western music along with classes on general education 2) to encourage the development of students by promoting knowledge both in artistry and literacy matters and 3) to produce expert dancers and musicians to work in the Department of Entertainment (Chansuwan, 1994:117-118). However, at the end of King Rama VI's reign, the Department of Entertainment and Dance School were closed down because of the global economic crisis.

During the 1910s, court dance was not only offered as training in the Department of Entertainment but also in other noble households. One of the most famous court dance troupes in this period was the Wang Suankularb (or, 'Suankularb Palace') (1911-1919) which was initiated by the prince of Asdang Dejavudh, the prince of Nakhon Ratchasima in 1911. This dance troupe undertook traditional dance training from King Rama II and trained young girls in the arts of royal court and social etiquette. This dance troupe did not perform for commercial purposes but only for royal special occasions or the prince's pleasure (101 Anniversary of Lakhon Wang Suankularb, 2012: 130). The troupe disbanded when the prince Asdang Dejavudh passed away in 1924. Many court dancers of this royal household, such as Lamoon Yamakub, Phaew Sanitwong and Chaleay Sukawanit, were later invited to be leading masters, who set up the dance curriculum in the School of Dramatic Arts and produced dance productions in the Fine Arts Department.

The mid-1920s, which oversaw the rule of King Rama VII (King Prajadhipok), were known as the dark era of court dance because all court dance activities were discontinued to reduce court expenditure, in an attempt to resolve the aforementioned economic crisis (Rutnin 1982:7). Some royal dancers in the Department of Entertainment were transferred to the other departments where they worked as officers instead of dancers. However, by the end of 1926, there were many state banquets for which cultural performance was

needed in order to present Thai identity, thus the Department of Entertainment was reopened, but scaled down from a department to a division created particularly to perform those events. In 1929, there were not enough young dancers available to perform, so the Division of Entertainment subsequently opened doors to younger generations to train them in classical dance, especially for official occasions (Fahchumroon, 1996: 89). At this time, the Division of Entertainment—formerly the School of Royal Scouts under Royal Patronage—did not continue to offer training, but made an exception for these limited performances. These young students subsequently went on to become the main dance teachers at the re-established Fine Arts Department in 1933.

Changes in Organisation of Court Dance

After the revolution of 1932, as a result of change in political ideas from royalty to a form of democratic government, the culture of the court and court dance were reformed by the new state organisation. After a year of revolution, the state established the Fine Arts Department (Krom Sinlapakon) on 29 January 1933 to take control of cultural activities and shifted the power of the Royal Household Department to the Fine Arts Department (So.Tho.0701.1.1/14:1²). A year later, the School of Dramatic Arts was established to train new generations in Thai classical dance. It sought a shift in the responsibility for the organisation of classical dance, from the former Ministry of the Royal Palace to the Ministry of Education. This transformation extended court dance patronage to the dance academy. Traditional court dance had emerged from the royal household and was reintegrated into a modern classicist mode as part of national policies concerning cultural development and education. Court dance was no longer attached to the institution of the monarchy. I argue that as a result of this transformation of court dance under the government patronage and management, the role and function of classical Thai dance

² So.Tho.0701.1.1/14 the History of the Fine Arts Department (ความเป็นมาของกรมศิลปากร)

radically shifted from the pleasure of the elites to a dance for the nation at large, which then brought about a change in the statuses of royal dancers, and affected dance transmission and dance creation.

New Organisation of Court Dance: The Fine Arts Department

The new government established the Fine Arts Department with the purpose of making it a centre for Thai traditional Arts which was mainly aimed at organising royal arts and traditional activities. Court dancers and musicians from the Ministry of the Royal Household and those who trained in the theatre troupes of the nobility were transferred to the Fine Arts Department (So.Tho.0701.40:104-124³). This situation brought about the change in the status of court dancers from royal officials to civil servants, and they had to comply with the directives of the bureaucracy and follow regulations like other government officials. Moreover, classical dance was no longer performed for royal pleasure but changed to serve government requirements (So.Tho.0701.9.1/4:19⁴). In a speech given by the First General Director of the Fine Arts Department, Luang Wichit Wathakan, on welcoming transferred officials from the Ministry of Royal Palace (July,1935), he emphasised the value of the new status of dancers, noting that:

Our main duties are to protect and preserve national arts, to demonstrate to foreigners that we have civilisation and culture, to help the people live happily and joyfully, to educate the younger generation by using arts as a tool, to persuade the Thai race, dispersed in different regions, that the centre of civilisation and culture is Siam [. . .]

As we can see that our duty is more extended than when we had worked before in the Ministry of Royal Palace that we can work more for the nation. If we love the nation, we would be really proud of our new duty [. . .] Instead of working under the aristocrat's

³ So.Tho.0701.40:104-124 the lists of the governors in Ministry of Royal Household transferred to the Fine Arts Department (ราชนามข้าราชการกระทรวงวังที่โอนมากรมศิลปากร)

⁴ So.Tho.0701.9.1/4 The Fine Arts Department Project, Luang Wichit Wathakan 1934 (โครงการกรมศิลปากร หลวงวิจิตรวาทการ 2479)

pleasure, we follow the administrative rules and regulations, which is more certain than personal emotion [. . .] If we follow the regulations, we are always right. Instead of the reduction of salary by aristocrat's pleasure, it guarantees that increase or reduction of salary, getting a promotion or any punishment are definitely followed the rules and regulations.

(The First General-Director of the Fine Arts Department, 1992: 75⁵) translated by author

According to the policy of the Fine Arts Department in 1934, three main benefits were considered for the nation: an educational benefit, a political one and an economic one. In terms of the suggested educational benefit: the Fine Arts Department was founded as an artistic centre that was not only responsible for gathering and preserving all traditional Thai arts but also for developing research on Thai arts. A proposed political benefit was framed by the department's aim in reviving national arts which were regarded to represent a quality of 'Thai-ness' in order to arouse a sense of pride in the cultural heritage of Thai people. In addition, the state believed that if people took an interest in the arts, it suggested that peace and harmony could be maintained in the country. The final objective was to revive the national arts for commercial purposes in order to strengthen the national economy, both domestically and internationally, through the tourist industry (So.Tho.0701.1.1/14:1-3⁶).

In terms of the development of Thai performing arts, the Fine Arts Department established the Division of Dance and Music following the main policy of the department with three objectives: to preserve the traditional performing arts, to develop them and to use dance and music as tools for economic purposes (So.Tho. 0701.3.1/12: 79-88⁷).

⁵ The speech of General Director of the Fine Arts Department on welcoming transferred officials from the Ministry of Palace, July 1935 (The first General Director of the Fine Arts Department, 1992: 74-79)

(สุนทรพจน์อธิบดีกรมศิลปากรกล่าวต้อนรับข้าราชการที่มาจากกระทรวงวัง อธิบดีคนแรกของกรมศิลปากร)

⁶ So.Tho.0701.1.1/14:1-2 The History of the Fine Arts Department (ความเป็นมาของกรมศิลปากร)

⁷ So.Tho. 0701.3.1/12 2478- 2482 the establishment of Sinlapakorn School, the report of the General Director of the Fine Arts Department (การตั้ง โรงเรียนศิลปากร รายงานอธิบดีกรมศิลปากร)

According to ‘A Report of the General Director from the period 1935-1939’, Luang Wichit suggested that the way to preserve traditional dance was not through repeated, unchanged performances, but through adaptation, such as with the incorporation of new staging, light and sound technologies, and through the cutting and removal of redundant performative elements. As a result of this policy, there was a great impact on traditional dance wherein it was simplified and modernised, going on to become the new mode of Thai dance drama, discussed in depth in the following section.

The preservation of traditional arts cannot be achieved by just practicing old techniques [. . .] This will only result in a gradual decline. Traditional arts can only be preserved by using new techniques and forms of presentation, for example, by using modern settings and lighting which creates better effects than the older forms of the same. The presentation needs to be modernised, but the genuine essence of traditional arts remains the same.

(Ibid:80) translated by author

The other objective was to develop the performing arts; the Fine Arts Department paid great attention to dance education as they believed that it was the best way to develop the traditional arts (Ibid:80). Consequently, the national dance and music school was established for training dancers in classical dance and music. Court dancers were expected not only to specialise in artistic skills but also have to gain a general knowledge of dance. According to Luang Wichit’s speech for welcoming transferred royal officials from the Ministry palace, to improve the education of artists implied improving the quality of arts in general. He argued, ‘Uneducated artists could destroy the country’s desired image of high civilisation and culture’ (Wathakan, 1935 cited in Fahchumroon, 1996:98). As the result of this policy and Luang Wichit’s motivations, new regulations for artists were imposed; for example, royal dancers who worked for the Fine Arts Department had to attend classes to improve their general knowledge and raise the standard of their educational achievements.

The final objective of the policy aimed to use the performing arts to encourage tourism; as a result, it would be of benefit to the country's economy (Ibid: 88). This policy brought about changes in traditional dance and its functions to serve the needs of tourism. Luang Wichit stated that Thai traditional dance should be used to entertain foreign tourists and to show the long-standing traditions and culture of Thailand. He suggested that increasing tourist numbers was the duty of the Fine Arts Department, not only to produce traditional dance but also as part of an attempt to enable foreigners to understand the arts and Thai civilisation. He later suggested that the establishment of the Division of Cultural Promotion be a part of the School of Dramatic Arts:

The Fine Arts Department has asked for a budget for the establishment of a new division—the Division of Cultural Promotion, similar to the Culture Propaganda Bureau in Japan. The works of drama and music are to be included in this division [. . .] So that they can attract more visitors to Siam which will help improve the economy of the country.

(So.Tho.0701.31/12: 79-88⁸) translated by author

The Establishment of the Academy of Dance and Music

The Academy of Dance and Music, named Rongrian Nataduriyangkhasat⁹—a school for training in classical dance and music—was founded on 17 May 1934, based on the French L'École des Beaux-Arts and l'Academie de Danse et Musique (Rutnin, 1993: 189). It was established to train dancers and musicians in place of private royal households. After the establishment of this school, the cultural status of artists, and many aspects of court performance, were changed. As mentioned earlier, Luang Wichit emphasised that the importance of education enabled an escalation in the status of Thai artists and helped to

⁸ Ibid :79-88

⁹ The School name was changed to Rongrian Sinlapakorn (Sinlapakorn School) in 1936 when it was expanded to include arts subjects such as painting and sculpture. However, Sinlapakorn School was later reorganised; painting and sculpture were transferred to be a part of University of Fine Arts, but the Academy of Dance and Music remained under the Fine Arts Department with its name changing periodically. Currently the school's name is Withayalai Nattasin (the College of Dramatic Arts).

modernise Thai art. The curriculum of this school was designed not just to provide artistic skill but also general education, as a formal school. The details about dance education will be analysed in depth in Chapter Four.

In the first stage of establishing the dance school, there were many political problems and obstacles because the arts in Thai society were criticised and undervalued. As Luang Wichit complained, ‘To develop fine arts is the most difficult task in Thai society because not only ordinary people but even the members of parliament are not able to appreciate the value of arts’ (So.Tho.0701.31/4:2¹⁰). In a letter from Luang Wichit to Prince Chulachakaphong, who had received a degree in history at Cambridge University, Luang Wichit wrote about the problem of the dance school operation. He explained to the Prince that

To preserve Thai culture is very difficult especially in case of Thai theatre. I set up the dance school named Rongrian Nataduriyangkhasat, which will be one division of Silapakorn School next year. Rongrian Nataduriyangkhasat has already operated for a year struggling along with many problems both internal and external. The internal problem comes from some committees in the Ministry of Education who are dissatisfied with the establishment of this school. It can be seen that the teachers under the Ministry of Education get a salary freeze while a teacher working at the the same level from another school gets a raised rise.

(Ibid:115) translated by author

It is interesting to note that Rongrian Nataduriyangkhasat, the Academy of Dance and Music, would not only aim at developing traditional dance education and promoting Thai culture, but also play an important role in supporting new government policies. As a close ally of the aforementioned People’s Party, Luang Wichit helped the state by using the theatre as a tool to promote nationalism and the state’s policies. According to Prasertsud (1998:108), who writes about Luang Wichit’s use of theatre as propaganda, ‘the role of the Department and its School was to be a state mechanism for the nationalist campaign’.

¹⁰ So.Tho.0701.31/4:115 The establishment of Silapakorn School (การตั้งโรงเรียนศิลปากร)

She emphasised that Luang Wichit used the school as the main resource to train the students to perform his patriotic plays at the theatre of the Fine Arts Department in order to further the cause of Thai nationalism in public. The School operated as an official mode of propaganda.

For almost a decade during the period of Luang Wichit regime, the traditional performing arts—particularly classical forms such as *Khon*, the royal masked play—were rarely performed, and were excluded from the dance curriculum of the Academy of Dance and Music. Even though many musicians and dancers were transferred from the royal household department and nobility theatre troupes to be dancers and dance masters (Yupho 1973:90-91), they were not responsible for teaching and performing traditional dance. *Khon* dancers had to train in western music instruments instead of performing and teaching *Khon* dance drama (Sayakom, 1982:6). In addition, under the regulation involving officials of the dance division which was part of the new Fine Arts Department, officials were prohibited from performing or teaching outside the Department unless the Department granted permission (Wathakan, 1963: 68-69).

It can be seen that most productions of the Fine Arts Department during this period were directed in the style most identified with Luang Wichit, rather than as traditional dance drama, in order to propagate and instil the political ideals of the new government. The theatre form was a mix of traditional dance with spoken drama and modern techniques, and the production was more dramatic and less sophisticated. The students in the national dance school were trained in the new theatrical performance style instead of in traditional court dance and mainly performed for Luang Wichit's productions. The students of this school rarely performed traditional Thai dance but offered public performances of Luang Wichit's nationalist plays instead. The details of Luang Wichit's play will be discussed in the next section.

Productions of the Fine Arts Department: The Hybrid Dance Drama to Propagate Thai Nationalism

The socio-political context not only impacted the organisation of court dance, but also its function, value, and conditions of creation. The traditional court dance was no longer considered representative of the country's high arts after the revolution. The government instead newly introduced national arts that demonstrated the modernity of the nation and the 'purity' of Thai culture. This section investigates how court dance started to adapt and simplify its form and conventions to suit the modern social context, and how this has had a long-lasting impact on dance and its transformation that continues up until the present.

At the beginning of the establishment of the Fine Arts Department, traditional dance drama was not massively promoted or performed because there were not enough professional dancers. According to the annual report of the Fine Arts Department in 1936, the main duty of the Division of Dance and Music was to perform at the behest of the government on official occasions, for radio broadcasts, public events, *Khon* and *Lakhon*, for instance, and help the government in any public sector, welcome guests of the government, and organise special events for foreigners (which involved additional payment) (So.Tho.0701.9.2/2¹¹). However, at that time, due to a lack of skillful dancers, the two forms of Thai classical dance drama, *Khon* and *Lakhon*, were rarely performed when traditional dance drama was performed on the stage of the Fine Arts Department. Mere excerpts from traditional dance drama were performed as symbols of ancient Thai culture on official occasions such as in a levee at Parliament house, or at an event to welcome a new governor. (So.Tho.0701.40/7:2¹²). This is because the dancers who had been transferred from the Royal household were old and unable to perform, as a result of

¹¹ So.Tho.0701.9.2/2 The Report of work following the policy, 6 months after 1936 (รายงานกิจการตามนโยบาย 6 เดือน หลัง 2479)

¹² So.Tho.0701.40/7:2 the report of the official activities from April to September 1936 (ส่งรายงานกิจการแต่เดือนเมษายนถึงกันยายน 2479)

which the Fine Arts Department relied upon apprentice students from the Academy of Dance and Music, who were novice dancers, to perform dance drama instead (Kerdarunduksri, 2001: 63).

Most Fine Arts Department productions during this period were performed in Luang Wichit's theatrical style as patriotic plays instead of classical dance drama. Although early productions were performed as traditional dances, they utilised newer stories composed by Luang Wichit, instead of ancient stories such as the *Ramayana* or *Inao*, which were part of the traditional court dance repertoire. As mentioned earlier, Luang Wichit realised the power of theatre for propaganda, and thus used plays to disseminate his ideas of nationalism to Thai audiences. However, these early plays, which Luang Wichit wrote in the style of traditional dance, were not commercially successful. Some dance dramas were composed and performed only once for a special event and would never be performed again until the present day; for example, *Phra Nareasuan Prakat Itsaraphap* (1934), *Phra Ratchathida Phra Ruang* (1934) *Suriyakhup* (1934), *Uthen* (1936) (So.tho.0701.1/11:11¹³). *Phra Naresuan Prakat Itsaraphap* (Naresuan's Declaration of Independence) was the first historical play used to disseminate a message about the importance of unity amongst Thai people, and of courage and sacrifice for the nation. The play presented the Thai history of liberation of the Ayuthaya Kingdom by the King Naresuan after it was occupied by Burma for over fifteen years. The other play was *Phra Ratchathida Phra Ruang* (Phra Ruang's Daughter), which was performed in August in 1934 in public. This play presented the story of Phra Ruang, a Thai hero in the thirteenth century Sukhothai Empire. These two plays followed the convention of the traditional dance drama as their mode of performance, but they did not attract new audiences. Therefore, Luang Wichit had to develop his own style of drama which

¹³ So.tho.0701.1/11:11 Order of the Fine Arts Department regarding the performing arts in any official occasion (คำสั่งเรื่องการแสดงต่างๆ ของกรมศิลปากรในการต้อนรับและช่วยเหลือตามที่ต่างๆ)

combined many elements such as the western canon of spoken drama and modern techniques, such as realistic scenes, and the use of light and sound technology, with Thai dance elements. The mode of performance that emerged from his nationalist plays was later known as *Lakhon Luang Wichit* (Luang Wichit's plays) and became a new theatrical genre of Thai Theatre.

The Transformation of the Popular Play to a New Theatrical Genre

After performing the patriotic plays, the Academy of Dance and Music began to sell tickets for performances to the public commercially in order to collect more money for the building of the first theatre of the School. When the School was established initially, there were no permanent buildings for the Academy of Dance and Music and the National Theatre; therefore, the school used parts of the National Museum's building for classrooms and as a temporary theatre. To raise funds for the construction of a permanent theatre building and raise the public profile of the School, in 1936, Luang Wichit composed and directed a new play named *Luat Suphan* (The Blood of the Suphan People), which is regarded as his most popular play and later became a model for his other patriotic plays.

At the first performance of *Luat Suphan* in 1936, it was greatly successful in fund raising and arousing nationalist sentiments in Thai audiences. The high ranking government officials who came to see the play were impressed by the sense of patriotism in the production, and complimented it (So.Tho.0701.31/15¹⁴). During that time, *Luat Suphan* was performed approximately thirty-eight times to a lot of audiences, thus earning enough to provide funding to complete the first theatre auditorium of the Academy of Dance and Music (Phuchadaphirom, 2007: 56). Some of the budgets were allocated by the Ministry

¹⁴ So.Tho.0701.31/15 The comments about Silapakorn School 2480 (คำวิจารณ์เกี่ยวกับโรงเรียนศิลปากร 1937)

of Finance, which comprised a part of the admiring audience, as Luang Wichit explained in the program for *Luat Suphan*:

Besides insulting the artists, they also believed that giving funding to build a theatre or to cultivate the arts was useless. I founded the School of Arts, and we were able to perform a play there. We had to find some bamboos, borrow tents from soldiers, and borrow chairs from soldiers and from the Chamberlain. One day, Lord Sritamtibet, the Minister of Finance, came to see a play at the bamboo theatre. After the show, he told me that he would find some money for me to build a theatre [. . .] He was gone for a long while. And then he came back and told me that he could find six thousand five hundred baht [. . .] Therefore, the first theatre in our country started with only six thousand five hundred baht. We got the theatre because of the play *Luat Suphan* (The Blood of Suphan People). It gave us the chairs and all the other equipment in the theatre. It bought us the piano. *Luat Suphan* was, therefore, the first play in the history of my life and theatre. It earned the most money during that time, and we could build the theatre because of it. I was hoping to use it for about 5 years, but it has been 20 years now. The theatre that made us millions of baht started with only six hundred baht. That was the struggle that I wanted to tell you.

(Wathakan, Wichitwannakadee: *Luat Supan*, 105 Anniversary of Luang Wichit, 2003)

In creating *Luat Suphan*, Luang Wichit did not use the traditional court dance form as was the case with his previous plays, because court dance was too refined and slow, and therefore unsuitable to serve his propaganda purposes. Instead, he relied partially upon the form of spoken drama to produce this play; he combined theatrical elements from both traditional and western elements to produce a new genre of theatrical performance which would effectively promote nationalist ideology. Witayasakpan (1992:201) points out that Wichit's patriotic plays cannot be neatly fitted into any theatrical genres, such as dancing, speaking or singing, because he was selective about the elements which he thought would serve his objectives.



Figure 1.1 Bill boards advertising Luang Wichit's play, *Luat Suphan* (the Blood of Suphan People) at the Sinlapakon Theatre, 1934. Image courtesy of the *Luat Suphan* Program from the 105th Anniversary of Luang Wichit, 2003)

The distinctive plot of Wichit's play revolves around the use of myths and historical incidents. Prasertsud (1998:111) and Wanthana (1986:314) acknowledge that the use of history and myth in Luang Wichit's dramatic work could be effective insofar as it could turn myth into historical fact. This is a claim similar to one made by Winichakul (1994), another historian, according to whom the presentation of false events as if they were history in Wichit's plays could alter the historically recorded and collective memory of the past, and these plays very powerfully affected Thai beliefs and the culturally recognised memory of Thai history. For example, the plot of *Luat Suphan* was inspired by the historical incident of the decline of the Ayuthaya Empire in which Wichit drew on

the names of historical figures, sites, and events when he visited the Suphanburi province in 1934. As Wichit notes of his process of writing *Luat Suphan*:

In July, 1934, when I was mandated by Chao Phraya Yumarat to work about shrine of the city pillar at Suphanburi province, governors of Suphanburi took me to visit many important places until I got into the moat. After sightseeing the city, images of the war when Myanmar invaded Suphanburi in the sack of Ayuthaya came up in my mind. This place along the river of Suphan probably used to be the Burmese military camp where Suphan villagers were oppressed by Burmese soliders. I was considering this incident; from our understanding, the Burmese were very cruel and persecuted Thais. In fact, there were still good Burmese. It is an old-fashioned idea to teach the Thai people to hate and seek revenge on the Burmese, our neighbours. We should make an alliance together, even though we used to be an enemy.

(Wathakan, Wichitwannakadee: *Luat Supan*, 105 Aniversary of Luang Wichit, 2003)

Most scholars (Prasertsud,1998; Brame,1993) regard *Luat Suphan* as Wichit's best play because of its sophisticated plot and complex reworking of sentimentality. The play shows the conflict between love, and duty and patriotism as presented in the historical period in the invasion of Ayuthaya by the Burmese. The play is set during the war in which a group of Thai villages from Supanburi were invaded, and villagers mistreated by the Burmese. The play engages with the love/duty dichotomy in its portrayal of a romance between a Burmese soldier, Mangrai, and a Thai girl, Duangjan. Mangrai falls in love with Duangjan and decides to help Duangjan and the other Thai prisoners escape from the Burmese soldiers. A commander of the Burmese troops, who is Mangrai's father, announces that any soldier who frees Thai captors would be executed. Thus, when the commander discovers that his own son had broken the rule, he struggles between his love for his son and his duty. Eventually, he issues orders to execute his son. When Duangjan learns of her beloved's impending execution, she returns to offer her life in exchange for

that of her love but her appeal is unsuccessful. Meanwhile, on her return to the village, the Burmese soldiers kill her parents and other Thai villagers as they believe that her parents were a cause of the death of Mangrai. After the death of her parents and her beloved, Duangjan decides to lead the Thai villages to fight the Burmese, as a small group of people with no weapons. In the end, the Thai villagers fight courageously, but are all killed at the hands of the Burmese soldiers.

It is interesting to note that the success of *Luat Suphan* had a great impact on the Fine Arts Department and the development of Thai theatre. The state realised the importance of theatre through its effect on Thai audiences; as a result, funding was granted by the state for other patriotic plays produced by the Fine Arts Department and great support was lent to the Academy of Dance Music. Moreover, theatre and culture became the most important arenas in cultural policy for the subsequent government which used the performing arts to showcase their idea of a civilised Thai nation. I will discuss the impact of the performing arts on the Cultural Revolution, in the following section. The other indirect effect of *Luat Suphan* is on the emergence of a new style of Thai theatre which uses the play as a blueprint. Consequently, Luang Wichit continued to use this distinctive style of performance to produce his subsequent plays, which later became known as ‘Luang Wichit Play’, and was developed to be a part of the Thai theatrical genre when it was taught in the Academy of Dance and Music.

The new Thai Theatrical Genre: Luang Wichit Plays

The theatrical performances of Luang Wichit’s plays have characteristics which distinguish them from traditional dance drama performances. According to Witayasakpan’s analysis of Luang Wichit’s national plays (1992:209), these differences manifest in the treatment of themes, the main character and dialogue, and are the outcome of social change and the evolution of the system from absolute monarchy to democracy.

Firstly, in terms of the theme, Luang Wichit's plays mainly focus on the idea of sacrifice for the nation, while the court repertoire glorified divine kingship and loyalty to the king; for example in the *Ramayana*, *Inao* and *Unarut* which presented the King as a hero. Another differing aspect is the treatment of the main characters wherein Luang Wichit's plays cast women as the main characters, whereas the court tradition never cast women in leading roles; the latter being the case because of traditional Thai beliefs in the lower status of women, wherein they were generally portrayed as obedient, loyal wives, and submissive daughters who were followers, not leaders. In contrast, Wichit's plays present women as courageous and devoted heroines who sacrifice their lives for the nation. Finally, with regards to the dialogue, traditional court drama used reverent language and relied importantly on singing in the verse form, while Wichit's plays use everyday language, even in the portrayal of the character of the prince, because it is easily accessible and can evoke nationalist messages.

Dance Choreography in Productions of Wichit's Plays

Luang Wichit's plays were mainly performed in the style of realism. This new style drew more from ordinary movement than from the elaborate theatricality of traditional dances. In the convention of classical dance drama, the play was narrated through *Ti-bot*, a dance language in which dancers use hand gestures to depict the text. This traditional dance form was employed in parts of productions of Luang Wichit's plays; for example, in a scene introducing the character of the monarch, *Ti-bot* was used to act out the dialogue in verse. Whereas, in other scenes when the performers converse in more common language, a natural acting style was used to communicate instead. However, the style utilised in Luang Wichit's productions did not involve acting 'naturally', but rather a combination of traditional dance and natural acting which Thai dancers term *Kam Bae* acting (or, the act of closing and opening of hands) (Raphiphan, 2003). This acting technique was a prominent feature of his patriotic songs.

It is interesting to note that because the plays lean towards realistic acting, overall, rather than traditional dancing, the leading roles were mostly performed by the students of the Academy of Dance and Music instead of professional dancers; these students did not have much training and experience in traditional dance, so they adapted a more realistic acting style which focused on the delivery of emotions. Sayakom (1982:11), a prominent court dancer who worked with Luang Wichit, indicated that court artists rarely played leading roles in Luang Wichit's plays. Chamriang, a court dancer whose interview is cited by Witayasakpan (1992:131), similarly observed that court dancers were mainly assigned small roles or elaborate dances as part of the plays, or dances for entertainment between scenes.

An important element in Luang Wichit's productions was a short collation of patriotic songs called *Phleng Pluk Jai*. These nationalist songs were mostly performed as part of the play, during an interval or while scenes were changing. Classical dance movements in these patriotic songs were newly choreographed by simplifying and adapting the conventional movements of *Ti-bot*. This technique was later used in the patriotic songs and was acknowledged as a part of Wichit's distinctive dance style. Due to the clear lyrics, easy melodies and dance movements, his nationalist songs remain popular and have frequently been performed whenever there is a need to arouse a sense of patriotism, even today. For example, in the recent political crisis in Thailand in May 2014, when the Thai military declared a state of emergency and imposed martial law, Wichit's patriotic songs were repeatedly played on the radio and television. Moreover, today the dance pieces in his plays are regularly performed in isolation from the original plays and taught as dances for beginners. They also comprise a part of the dance curricula in the College of Dramatic Arts, and primary schools.

After the success of *Luat Suphan* in its effective propagation of nationalism, the Fine Arts Department lead by Luang Wichit was supported by the government to produce many patriotic plays in order to help the state to promote national culture and policy. Most scholars (Witayasakpan, 1992; Prasertsud, 1998; Raphiphan, 2003) indicate that Luang Wichit's propaganda plays were particularly popular and influential in Thai theatre from the mid-1930s to the late 1950s, which was a period of great change in Thai society, which I reflect on more in the following section.

Impact of Social Change on Court Dance: Bridge Elite and Ordinary Taste

A dramatic change in Thai cultural system and performing arts occurred during Phibun's first period as prime minister (1938-1944).¹⁵ This period was considered as a turning point for Thai performing arts, bringing about the decline of folk dance and popular theatre which the state considered did not represent Thai identity. During this time, the Fine Arts Department as the cultural center played a significant role in not only aiding productions to help the state convey its national cultural policy, but also in controlling all kinds of performing arts following the new regulations. However, even though this new cultural policy did not affect classical dance, it helped to merge both elite and ordinary tastes. This will be the main argument in this section.

This section focuses on the impact of cultural policy on Thai classical dance emphasising the regulations of cultural policy set by the Phibun government, during the Cultural Revolution from 1938 to 1944. Two important policies are discussed: the first is the *Ratthaniyom*, or the guidelines for new national customs; an important source for understanding the changes described as "civilising" that relate to national identity and cultural nationalism. The second key document is the edict of cultural control, 'The Royal Decree of the Cultural Determination for the Theatre Arts 1942', which limited,

¹⁵ Phibun was forced to resign in 1944 and then made a comeback in 1948 before being overthrown again by a military coup in 1957

censorised and controlled public performance. In this context, the emergence of the Thai national identity is highlighted to provide an understanding of the change in the function of classical dance investigated in this study.

The Cultural Revolution in Phibun Period (1938-1944)

Many scholars (Reynolds, 2002:4, Witayasakpan, 1992:112) claim that the concept of nationalism and cultural systems in Thailand radically changed in the period of the Phibun government. By the end of 1930s, Thailand faced the threat of World War II, and Phibun, as the Prime Minister of the time, had to build the Thai nation by attempting to create a new concept of nationalism and trying to ‘civilise’ Thailand. Phibun established a new national cultural policy involving various laws and regulations aimed at promoting new cultural patterns as a change to Thai lifestyle, beliefs, manners, and conduct. Witayasakpan’s research on Phibun’s cultural policy summarises that Phibun’s policy was ‘anti monarchical, pro-western, anti-Chinese, and indigenous-oriented’ (Witayasakpan, 1992:112). However, this cultural policy was claimed to be unusual and completely transformed old Siam to new Thailand. Although these cultural regulations were withdrawn when Phibun was forced to step down in 1944, some of them have had a lasting effect on Thai culture even today.

Thai National Identity: The Transformation of Old Siam to New Thailand

Between June 1939 and January 1942, the state lead by Phibun issued the *Ratthaniyom*, or cultural mandates with twelve guidelines, to present his nationalist policy, as recorded in *Pramuan Watthanatham Heang Chat* (Collection of National Culture). The word ‘*Rattha*’ means state and ‘*Niyom*’ means admire, so the *Ratthaniyom* meant state’s guidelines which subjects were encouraged to follow. According to Luang Wichit’s speech on a radio broadcast by the Fine Arts Department, the new cultural policy aimed at creating a homogenous Thai-ness based on the idea of Thai ethnocentrism. The

Ratthaniyom was divided into three main principles regarding the nation and country, the livelihood of Thai people, and social etiquette (So.Tho.0701.29/35:5¹⁶).

In order to raise awareness of the new nation, the first cultural mandate was issued on 24 June 1939 declaring that the name of the country had been changed from Siam to Thailand (*Ratthaniyom* No.1, June 24, 1939). The word ‘Thai’ had two meanings, one referring to the ethnicities of the ‘Tai’ people and the other meaning ‘freedom’. This mandate demonstrated a new nationalism aimed at creating a united Thai-ness modeled on ethnic notions of the Thai. *Ratthaniyom* No.3, issued on 2 August 1939, was about using the term ‘Thai’ to identify people from all part of Thailand regardless of their ethnicity. The state issued *Ratthaniyom* No.9 on 24 June 1940, encouraging the Thai people to use the central Thai language as the national language. Despite the fact that Thai people in different regions had their own local language, they were required to use the same language. This is because the government considered the name and language to be an important source to unite the Thai people.

As an important part of nation-building, national symbols such as the flag, the national anthem and the royal anthem were heavily promoted by the new state. *Ratthaniyom* No.4, issued on 8 September 1939 directed Thai people to express loyalty and pay respect to the Thai national flag, Thai national anthem and the royal anthem. Moreover, because of the revolution, the lyrics of the former national anthem and the royal anthem were changed. The sixth mandate concerning the national anthem and the eighth mandate concerning the royal anthem were issued to emphasise the lyrics of the two anthems that needed to be framed in terms of Thai identity and national security. These invented customs continue to persist in Thai society today.

In order to build national growth, the state began controlling certain cultural practices, such as social etiquettes, which were regarded as uncivilised at the time.*Ratthaniyom* No.

¹⁶ So.Tho.0701.29/35:5 *Ratthaniyom* by Luang Wichit Watthakan (รฐนิยม โดยหลวงวิจิตรวาทการ)

10, 11, and 12 prescribed new customs and lifestyles for Thai people such as defining decorum, and improper and proper dress in public and daily life. For example, wearing common clothing such as a sarong, only underpants, or, for women, wrap-around cloth worn in public places, were deemed to be impolite. The suggestion for acceptable clothing included uniforms, western attire, or traditional costume (*Ratthaniyom* No.10, 15 January 1941). In addition, the new lifestyle or daily activities were suggested in *Ratthaniyom* No 11; for instance, Thai people were urged to have three proper daily activities: work, leisure, and enough sleep. It suggested that people should have meals punctually not more than four times a day, sleep at least six to eight hours, work diligently, and exercise for at least an hour a day or do gardening in the evening. Moreover, people were encouraged to participate in useful activities during free time and weekends such as listening to the news, reading, religious activities or educating themselves (*Ratthaniyom* No 11, September 8, 1941).



Figure 1.2 The propagation of cultural mandate concerning proper dress in public. The left side depicts ‘Do not wear’ clothing, and on the right is approved clothing. Image courtesy of Phuchadaphirom, 2007:172

The Government National Culture Policy on Thai Theatre Performance

The Phibun government not only issued the cultural mandates to revolutionise Thai society, but also laid out the royal decree to modernise theatrical performance. The state realised that the performing arts, drama and music were regarded as important sources to showcase national culture and were effective means to cultivate morality; therefore, it was necessary to develop and modernise the traditional performing arts, drama and music to ‘civilise’ Thai audiences (So.Tho.0701.29/24:1¹⁷). Thus, the state promulgated the Royal Decree Prescribing Culture Concerning Theatrical Performances in 1942 and the Royal Decree Prescribing Artistic Culture Regarding Musical Performances, Singing, and Recitation in 1943.

These Royal Decrees adapted the western aesthetics of performance as the framework to develop Thai traditional performance. Wichit, as the General Director of the Fine Arts Department, was requested by Prime Minister Phibun to develop a new classification system for the performing arts by using western theatrical genres as models to classify (Ibid: 54). The framework of theatrical classification indicated in the Royal Decree are as follows:

1. อุปรากร Upparakon (Opera)
 - ก. มหาอุปรากร Maha Upparakon (Grand Opera)
 - ข. นาटकัมคนตรี Nattakam Dontri (Musical Drama)
 - ค. จุลอุปรากร Chunla Upparakon (Operetta)

¹⁷ So.Tho.0701.29/24 The explication of objective in issuing the Royal Decree Prescribing Cultural Concerning Theatrical Performance, 1942

(คำชี้แจงความประสงค์ในการประกาศใช้พระราชกฤษฎีกากำหนดวัฒนธรรมทางศิลปกรรมเกี่ยวกับการแสดงละคร)

ง. สุขอุปรากร Sukkha Upparakon (Comic Opera)

จ. หัซอุปรากร Halsa Upparakon (Opera Bouffe)

2. นาคะกัม Nattakam (Drama)

ก. โสกนาคะกัม Sokkanattakam (Tragedy)

ข. นาคะบัท Nattabot (Drama)

ค. เวกนาคะกัม Wekhanattakam (Melodrama)

ง. สุขนาคะกัม Sukkhanattakam (Comedy)

จ. หัสนาคะกัม Hatsanattakam (Farce)

3. นาคะดนตรี Natadontre (Musical)

ก. สุขนาคะดนตรี Sukkha Natadontre (Musical Comedy)

ข. ทัสนากร Thasanakan (Revue)

ค. วิจิตรทัสนา Wichit Thasana (Pantomime)

ง. วิพิธทัสนา Wiphit Thatsana (Variety Show)

(A Royal Decree Prescribing Culture Concerning Theatrical Performances, 1942: 1-4)

Traditional performance had to be adjusted to suit the new system and its definitions in order to enable easy forms of control. For example, *Khon* (Masked dance drama), *Lakhon*

Nok (Popular Dance Drama), and *Lakhon Nai* (Court Dance Drama), all of which are based on the form of dance theatre, were reclassified as ‘Pantomime’. *Lakhon Rong* (Singing Drama) and *Lakhon Phantang* (Hybrid Dance Drama), were classified as ‘Musical’, and *Lakhon Dukdamban* (Opera Dance Drama), which was based on singing, was considered to be ‘Opera’. Some traditional performances which could not be matched to any new western classifications, such as *Nangyai* (Shadow Play) and *Hun Kabok* (Puppet Theatre), required special permissions. Moreover, popular folk performance forms such as *Likey* and *Lumtud*, were prohibited from performance because these performances used improvisation, and dialects which were deemed impolite and obscene by regulation (So.Tho.0701.29/24:16-17¹⁸).

This new cultural policy brought about the decline of traditional folk performance and changed the tradition of dance and music. According to the minutes of the committee on developing and promoting music and drama, traditional dance like *Lakhon Chatri*, a dance drama that redeems vows to a god, which depicted ‘uncivilised culture’ were prohibited from being performed because it was thought that the dance—and dance culture—would be looked upon unfavourably by other countries (So.Tho.0701.29/23:53¹⁹). The folk performances which were not classified in the Royal Decree had to be controlled and limited to look more ‘civilised’; for example, the performance should only be performed in a place deemed appropriate, and sitting on the floor was not allowed for audiences (Ibid:66-67²⁰). To follow this policy, traditional performance needed to be adapted to suit the new cultural policy; for instance, the performers in *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance drama were supposed to wear shoes (Ibid: 61-

¹⁸ So.Tho.0701.29/24:16-17 The minutes of officials in controlling theatre and music (บันทึกroyalงานการประชุมเจ้าหน้าที่ควบคุมการแสดงละครและดนตรี)

¹⁹ So.Tho.0701.29/23:53 the minutes of the committee on developing and promoting music and theatre on 11 September, 1942 (บันทึกการประชุมกรรมการวัฒนธรรมปรับปรุงและส่งเสริมการดนตรีและละคร ครั้งที่ 1 วันที่ 11 กันยายน 2485)

²⁰ Ibid: 66-67 the third minutes of the committee on 27 October, 1942 (บันทึกroyalงานการประชุมครั้งที่ 3 วันที่ 27 ตุลาคม 2485)

62²¹). This policy upset dancers and musicians because the movement of bare feet is a very important element in Thai dance and traditional musical instruments were designed for musicians who sat on the floor (Phuchadaphirom, 2007: 56).

Following this Royal Decree, the Fine Arts Department was authorised to issue three regulations to standardise and control all kinds of performing arts. Firstly, the Regulations Concerning Permission and Control the Performing Arts, issued in December 1942, required that the performance in question receive permission from the Fine Arts Department before being performed in public. The Regulations indicated that the application for permission needed to be filed at least fifteen days before performing; an application which included scripts, the lists of performers and the performance without script, such as the type of dances, details of the style and a synopsis of the performance. The scripts could be changed following suggestions of the Fine Arts Department and observing the rehearsal was also a part of the decision-making process. The place of performance, or the theatre, had to be appropriate, and not endanger audiences. The Fine Arts Department claimed the right to suspend permissions anytime on the grounds of impropriety. Post 8 June 1943, all profession performers required licences from the Fine Arts Department to perform in public (So.Tho.0701.29/24:4²²).

The second regulation concerned artist training. All professional performers were required to attend the training program provided by the Fine Arts Department in order to obtain the artist licence. The training session would take at least forty-eight hours but not more than ninety days. The certificate was equivalent to the secondary level of the Academy of Dance and Music. The training program included both theory and practice

²¹ Ibid: 61-62 the second minutes of the committee on 2 October, 1942 (บันทึกกราชงานการประชุมครั้งที่ 2 วันที่ 2 ตุลาคม 2485)

²² So.Tho.0701.29/24:4 the Regulation of the Fine Arts Department Concerning Permission and Control the Performing Arts (ระเบียบกรมศิลปากรว่าด้วยการขออนุญาตและการควบคุมการแสดงละคร)

in dance, music, literature, history, law about arts and culture, and the Constitution (So.Tho.0701.29/24:5²³).

The third regulation concerned control of folk performance, issued in January 1943. The Fine Arts Department authorised local governors to use this regulation to oversee regional performances (So.Tho.0701.29/24:42²⁴). Witayasakpan's research on the impact of Phibun's cultural policy on folk performance reveals that controlling folk performance brought about much confusion amongst local governors because the regional performances were numerous and varied, but the types—and characteristics, such as costume and language—of performances allowed by the regulation were limited. *Ratthaniyom* opposed the characteristic of folk performances (Witayasakpan, 1992:162). As a result of this regulation, some forms of folk performance gradually disappeared.

In terms of productions by the Fine Arts Department, Phibun requested the Fine Arts Department compose productions, following the Royal Decree, which would become examples for other theatre troupes to follow. The most important theatre form, according to Phibun, was the 'Opera' as he believed this form of performance could present a 'civilised' country (So.Tho.0701.29/23: 67²⁵). In accordance with Phibun's request and cultural policy, the productions by the Fine Arts Department during this period tended to perform Luang Wichit's plays because they were a combination of traditional dance and western elements, as acknowledged earlier, and were in line with the cultural policy endorsed at the time.

²³ So.Tho.0701.29/24:5 the Regulation of the Fine Arts Department Concerning the Artist Training (ระเบียบการกรมศิลปากรว่าด้วยการอบรมศิลปิน)

²⁴ So.Tho.0701.29/24:42 the Regulation of the Fine Arts Department Concerning Control of Folk Performances (ระเบียบการกรมศิลปากรว่าด้วยการควบคุมการเล่นพื้นเมือง)

²⁵ So.Tho.0701.29/23:67 the third minutes of the committee on 27 October, 1942 (บันทึกรายงานการประชุมครั้งที่ 3 วันที่ 27 ตุลาคม 2485)

To support and promote the government's cultural policy in the nation-building, Luang Wichit produced many nationalistic plays performed under the name of Fine Arts Department. According to Witayasakpan's study on Thai theatre during the reign of the Phibun government (1938-1944), the productions of the Fine Arts Department evidently promoted national cultural policy and popularised the state's pan-Thai policy which included neighbouring countries to build a more powerful Thai nation (Witayasakpan, 1992). For example, *Ratchamanu* in 1936, purposes to announce the relationship between Thais and the Khmers; *Phrachao Krungthon* (The King of Thonburi) in 1937 supported the state's policy in the celebration the good relationship between Thai and Chinese community; *Chaoying Saewi* (The Princesses' of Saewi) in 1938 helped the government to promote the state's Pan-Thai policy; *Maha Thewi* (The Great Queen) in 1938 support the government's idea of uniting scattered groups of the Thai people; *Nanchao* in 1939 help justification to the state's policy of 'Thai-ification'; *Aunsawari Thai* (The Thai Monument) in 1939 purpose to encourage the Thai citizen to follow the national cultural policy; and *Phokhun Phamuang* (The Lord of Phamuang) in 1940 present the relationship between Thai and Cambodian.

However, the productions of the Fine Arts Department during the Cultural Revolution were criticised by royalists and scholars on the premise of the destruction of aesthetic value. For example, M.R. Kukrit Pramoj was a royalist trained in court tradition and a renowned scholar in Thai culture, journalist, and former prime minister. Cited in Witayasakpan, Pramoj noted critically in a seminar on 'Art after 1932' at Thammasat University in 1985, that 'Thai theatre after the 1932 coup was "tasteless" because it was shaped after "low class" western art' (Promoj, 1985, cited in Witayasakpan, 1992:13). This is similar to Rutnin's point of view that 'Phibun did much damage to 'Thai culture heritage', as classical theatre suffered under the government's policy of westernisation' (Rutnin, 1993:190-192).

It is worth noting that Luang Wichit's plays continue to have a tremendous impact on dance drama style and have become a key Thai theatrical genre. New editions of his plays are still printed and the Fine Arts Department still performs Luang Wichit's productions at the National Theatre on occasions such as the anniversary of his birth. Moreover, his nationalist plays have been taught in the College of Dramatic Arts and patriotic songs in his plays are taught as a compulsory part of the national syllabus for primary school students or beginner dancers, as noted earlier.



Figure 1.3 Luang Wichit's patriotic play 'Anuphap Phokhun Ramkhamhaeng' (The Power of King Ramkhamhaeng) performed in 1954. Photo courtesy of Phuchadaphirom, 2007:173

The New Created Dance: *Ramwong*

During the Cultural Revolution, the state invented the innovative dance form to represent Thai culture by combining both folk dance and classical dance. This new dance, called the Standard *Ramwong*, was also used to disseminate nationalism and national cultural policy. *Ramwong* means ‘circle dance’ or ‘to dance in circle’, was adapted from the folk popular seasonal entertainment in some regions of Thailand called *Ram Thon*. The name of the dance came from the drum—called *Thon*—as dancers followed the rhythm of a drum, using simple dance steps. This newly created dance revealed the accomplishment of the government to bridge the gap between elite art and popular culture and thus became a new form of middle class culture.

The Standard *Ramwong* initially created in 1943 when the governors of Nagkhai province presented *Ram Watthanatham* (a cultural dance) as the entertainment for the local officials. After seeing this dance performance, Phibun entrusted the Fine Arts Department with a task to adapt this folk dance to one that was more ‘civilised’ and renamed it *Ramwong* in 1944 (Witayasakpan, 1992: 155-156). In order to portray a civilised culture and promote this newly created dance as a national creation, the state popularised the Standard *Ramwong* among government officials by encouraging them to practice the dance every Wednesday afternoon (Phuchadaphirom, 2007: 148).



Figure 1.4 *Ramwong* performed by government officials on the Founding Anniversary of Ministry of Transport on 1 April 1944. Photo courtesy of Phuchadaphirom, 2007:75

In the Standard *Ramwong*, the lyrics of the songs reflect new forms of nationalism and cultural policy of Phibun Government especially from the *Ratthaniyom*. Originally, there were about more than sixty songs written for *Ramthon* and lyrics were about persuasion, teasing, praising and parting. After Phibun standardised *Ramwong* as a national dance, he asked that songs written should remind people about national culture and cultural guideline. The four new songs were created by the Fine Arts Department; *Ngarm Saeng Duen* (The Beauty of Moonlight), *Chau Thai* (Thai People), *Ram Si Mah Ram* (Come, Come and Dance), *Kuen Duen Ngai* (The Moonlit Night), most of which contain patriotic messages relaying aspects of national cultural policy. For example, the lyric of *Chau Thai* presents the duty of Thai citizens and reminds them of the reason why they should practice *Ramwong* dance:

All we Thai people, leave not your work undone nor shirk your duty.

That we Thai can sing and dance or amuse ourselves without a care in the world is due to the fact that we are absolutely free and independent.

All of us Thais should be closely united in our efforts to make the country strong and glorious so that all Thai can enjoy full happiness and prosperity forever.

(The Fine Arts Department, *Ramwong*, 1971: 24)

Later, the Standard *Ramwong* created six more songs by Lady Laiad Phibun Songkhram, Phibun's wife: *Duang Chan Wan Phen* (The Full Moon), *Dok Mai Khong Chat* (the Flower of the Nation), *Ying Thai Tchai Ngam* (the Thai Girl with a Gracious Heart), *Duang Chan Khwan Fa* (Queen of the Night Sky), *Yod Chai Chai Harn* (My Ideal Hero), and *Boochah Nak Rop* (Warrior Wordship). These additional songs followed cultural policy especially in promoting the status of women; for example, the song *Dok Mai Khong Chat* (The Flower of the Nation), which applauded the abilities of Thai women:

The Thai girl, often referred to as the flower of the nation, is very beautiful to look at while she is dancing. The movements of her shapely body are supple and graceful, and conform closely to the tradition of Thai classical dancing. Her gestures are meant to emphasise the fact that:

The country inhabited by the Thais has long been the seat of advanced culture.

The Thai girl is very capable. She is able to help her man in the tasks of building up the nation by sheer force of determination and indefatigable labour.

(The Fine Arts Department, *Ramwong*, 1971: 32)

The Standard *Ramwong* can be described as a hybrid dance form which combined folk dance, classical dance and ballroom dance. *Ramwong* used elements of folk dance as derived from *Ramthon*, which was not designed for public performance so there was no need for professional training in it. However, it was refined so as to conform to the art

and traditions of Thai classical dance. Moreover, aspects of ballroom dance were used as a part of partner dance or social dance in a civilised manner, and standardised footwork was created, combining classical hand gestures. The *Ramwong*'s music utilised traditional and western elements, and the costume was adapted to include traditional costume as well as western attire. Ten classical dance gestures specific to each song were formulated by teachers from the Academy of Dance and Music by adapting basic dance gestures and movement from *Maibot Yai*, a dance piece used for court dance training; for example, gesture 'Sod Soi Ma La' was used for the song *Ngam Sang Dean*, and gesture 'Chak Pang Pad Na' was used for the song *Chau Thai*, as the picture below indicates.



Figure 1.5 An example of the standard *Ramwong* gesture. Image courtesy of the Fine Arts Department, *Ramwong*, 1971:13

It can be said that the Standard *Ramwong* is a dance for everybody; it gradually spread to every region of Thailand and became popular, especially amidst Thai middle class. This

new class, including government officials and educated people, gradually emerged during this period and become a target of Phibun's ideology. Eeoseewong (2005), a renowned Thai historian, pointed out that the middle class could easily absorb the new diversity of culture, combining elements of both elite and popular culture, because they needed to evolve their own new cultural form. In 1957, when the Fine Arts Department operated the project of revivalism, *Ramwong* was revived and kept active among people, and later taught in compulsory Thai dance curriculum for primary schools. At the present time, *Ramwong* is widely performed not only by Thai people, but also by foreigners attending Thai events. This new invented tradition has remained in Thai society and has been passed on, preserved, until the present.

Conclusion

The period after the revolution of 1932 was viewed as major turning point in Thai court dance when the court dancers and musicians were no longer under the authority of the royal court, but were moved to be under the responsibility of the government through the Fine Arts Department, the Ministry of Education. The Fine Arts Department and the Academy of Dance and Music were established in order to become national arts centres. These two institutes played an important role in controlling and modernising Thai traditional performance. It is precisely this change of patronage that caused a shift in the nature of traditional dance, dance function and dance creativity. Traditional dance and theatre were adapted and used as tools to serve the government's purpose in propagating nationalist ideals. The Cultural Revolution during the Phibun period from 1938-1944 was also a key factor in shifting the role of traditional dance, wherein emerged as the new culture of the middle class. The new styles of dance and theatre were created with a combination of western elements, royal court dance and folk dance. However, when power changed hands, classical dance and its meaning were reshaped following the new

government's cultural policies. The next chapter will discuss the period after World War II when traditional dance, particularly court dance, was revived in Thai society.

Chapter 2

Reconstruction of Thai Classical Dance

The period immediately after World War II is seen as the beginning of a revival phase of classical dance in Thailand. The Fine Arts Department's revival of Thai classical dance began with a process of defining classicalism and transforming the value and function of court dance. Even though this period of revival of traditional dance witnessed a tremendous change in Thai court dance, there are very few studies on dance development focusing on this revival period. This is partly because it constituted the gap between tradition and modernity and a majority of research and dance study tended to relate the history of court dance up to the point of the old dynasty. In the mid-1940s, the Fine Arts Department directly reconstructed dance drama—or what it called 'ancient dance drama'—and became the most powerful patron of classical dance by establishing the Office of Performing Arts and reforming the School of Dramatic Arts under the Fine Arts Department, with a specific remit to propagate classical dance drama in Thai society. The main purpose of this chapter is to examine how the government reconstructed the history of the dance, and its practice, in order to promote a sense of Thai identity and stimulate the redefinition of Thai classical dance as national heritage. This phase of the thesis also reveals the power of state over cultural expression, as only the Fine Arts Department was permitted to mount performances of classical dance, and these performances were staged in significant cultural contexts at the National Theatre and for official occasions.

In this chapter, I draw upon on the concept of 'invented tradition' by Hobsbawm and Ranger in which they state that:

Invented tradition is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate

certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically impels continuity with the past. (2015:1)

In fact, Thai Classical dance—especially *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance dramas—is not invented tradition, because it does demonstrate an unbroken line of transmission from the past. However, in the case of Thai classical dance, I argue that it was the neo-classical dance which the state reconstructed in the mid-1940s, and which was then transmitted to the new generation as if it were preserved tradition. I would say that it is ‘re-invention’ because it was not wholly disseminated as bearing the concepts it did in the past but it was modified and modernised to suit the taste of new audiences from that revival period, before it was transmitted to later generations.

I specifically analyse the form of *Lakhon* dance drama, those performances that were revived during 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s and were promoted as representing the defining ‘classical’ traditions of Thai dance. These definitions of dance drama were closely linked with the development of Thai identity and cultural policy. It is interesting to work through the complex tracings of development in these dance drama forms over time. I am curious to know how these new forms of dance drama immediately mark and attempt to project a sense of continuity of a ‘tradition’, and to establish a strict code of ‘classicism’, whilst being newly-coined.

Therefore, this chapter is divided into 2 main sections. The first section focusses on the cultural policy which the new government used to publicise Thai art and culture for purposes of displaying a national cultural identity. I scrutinise the way in which a hegemonic discourse on dance was constructed by the elite in order to claim this dance as a revival of an ‘authentic’ Thai past, representing Thai national identity. In order to understand how the state empowers and monopolises classical dance and how traditional dance was reconstructed and reinvented, this section focuses on the cultural policy of the

revival of traditional dance in 1940s, the consequence of the establishment of Office of Performing Arts and the reformation of the School of Dramatic Arts which were the main institutions responsible for performing and training students in classical dance in Thailand.

The second section focusses on the publication and codification of classical dance. In this section, I am interested in understanding how the Fine Arts Department defined and emphasised the value of classical dance, *Khon* and *Lakhon*, those had been predominantly associated with royalty and in highlighting this evolution to look for a new identity for classical dance. The main purpose of this section will be to focus on the Fine Arts Department's printed documents and productions which offer a codification of the dance drama genres. I consider the printed documents about classical dance drama, and the development of a history of Thai classical dance, by focussing on the way in which the Fine Arts Department propagated knowledge about Thai classical dance and theatre to the wider public, and changed what people understand by classical dance. So the section will explore how the very history of Thai dance itself became formulised, and how the versions of the history of Thai dance drama written during the revivalist period operated. These histories also produced a standardised version of Thai dance practice; thus we will discuss how our knowledge of Thai dance drama today has been conditioned by this historical writing.

Furthermore, during this period of revival, there were many reinvented classical dance dramas presented as ancient Thai theatre. I also analyse productions of the Fine Arts Department which represented different dance genres: *Lakhon Chatri* (Popular dance drama), *Lakhon Nai* (Court dance drama), *Lakhon Nok* (outside-court dance drama). I am curious about the ways in which dance masters created various kinds of dance drama before they were preserved and transmitted to new generations. My central argument is that traditional dance training as it occurs today is a product of, and a result of the

productions of neo-traditional dance dramas reconstructed as part of this project of cultural revivalism.

Classical Dance and Thai Identity

To understand the social changes associated with revival of Thai dance, we need to examine not only the contexts in which dance occurred, but also the broader social factors surrounding these contexts. In the period of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, *Khon* and *Lakhon* were appropriated as nationalist cultural artifacts and transformed into public spectacles within both nationalist and tourist contexts. In order to examine and comprehend these processes, I draw out some of the political, ideological, and cultural issues of the period as relevant to this study. It is necessary to dwell upon the post-World War II period because cultural policy and Thai ideology morphed from the previous period which concerned the construction of a homogenous quality of ‘Thai-ness’, which I discussed in Chapter One, under the hegemony of the Thai elite. This policy marked the change of the value of *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance dramas in relation to their symbolic status as high art and culture.

After World War II, new forms of nationalism and monarchy were being fashioned. Saichol Sattayanurak (2013:119), a prominent Thai historian, points out that in order to resist a rising communist ideology, the new government order made a series of attempts to revive the spirit of the monarchy. In the mid-1940s, the emerging concept of an ideal, and limited, monarchy was developing progress in Thai society. The rebirth of the Thai monarchy was marked when King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the existing monarch of Thailand reigned on 9 June 1946, although later he was to become the most significant figure in raising the symbolic value of classical dance in Thai culture. I will discuss in more detail the role that the monarch played in supporting Thai classical dance in the subsequent chapter. During this period, Thai national identity was being dramatically

changed. The superiority of the monarchy and the elite were promoted. This process continued representing court dance as a high art or classical art and separated it from popular culture. As an emergent category, “classical” dance retained it as distinctive from other kinds of dance classed as “folk”.

In 1948, the cultural policy changed when Phibun took office a second term as Prime Minister (1948-1957). He had to modify his cultural policy to follow the new idea of Thai identity. He established the Ministry of Culture in 1952, by attempting to generate popular support by anchoring his rule in neo-traditionalist forms of legitimacy based on the *Phokun* (paternalistic) tradition of kingship (Connors, 2005:529). During this period, the Fine Arts Department was transferred from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Culture. As a result, it gained more subsidies from the government to support Thai cultural heritage including classical dance drama.

In 1957, Phibun was overthrown, and in 1958 a military regime led by Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, who later became Prime Minister, was backed as the new government. It was a shrewd policy of the new military government to revive old royal traditions and ceremonies to promote the prestige of the king, in order to win public approval and to create a sense of national unity (Sattayanurak, 2013:17; Rutnin,1993:9). Sarit abolished the Ministry of Culture and the National Culture Council, which had been closely associated with Phibun (Sattayanurak, 2013:29; Connors, 2005: 529). However, cultural politics did not disappear but developed a greater complexity.

Nevertheless, this abolition did not affect the development of classical dance drama, rather it was more encouraged; for example, in 1961, Sarit’s government granted a budget of fourteen million baht to construct a formal National Theatre in place of the old Sinlapakon Theatre (Rutnin, 1993: 225). Moreover, in 1960, the government promoted traditional notions of kingship and the central place of Buddhism in Thai identity. The

obvious evidence of supporting kingship was when the government changed the national day from 24 June, which was the date of revolution, to 5 December, the King's birthday, which later became National Father's Day (Jeamtherasakun:116-118). They also revived 'traditional' royal ceremonies and Buddhist holidays. Connors (2005:529) points out that neo-traditionalist notions were promoted through the rehabilitation of the king, thus displacing earlier notions of modern citizenship based on popular sovereignty. Moreover, classical dance had also been promoted abroad to reflect Thai national identity on various occasions, as a cultural symbol and commodity.

The other international factor that had shaped Thailand's cultural policies and affected the revival of traditional dance was UNESCO: a key international disseminator of ideas on culture, development, scientific practice, and ethical questions. In 1947, Thailand became a member of UNESCO in order to gain from international cooperation. A key objective of UNESCO was to encourage all countries to realise the importance of culture; an appreciation of cultural diversity was considered a contributing factor to international peace (Phuchadapirom, 2007:81). In order to follow the aims of UNESCO, the government realised that classical dance could present some of the richness of Thai heritage. It resulted in the establishment of a project to develop the performing arts and music in cultural policy in 1946 (2So.Tho.2/25²⁶). Since then, the court art of dance drama was revived and thinking about dance drama was influenced by the rhetoric of UNESCO. Thus we see a shift in the way that the dance drama was thought about, as it came to be 'preserved' as a symbol of 'cultural heritage'.

²⁶ (2 So.Tho.2/25) The project of improvement of Dance Drama and music in the Office of Performing Arts (การปรับปรุงการละครและดนตรีในกองการสังคีต)

Cultural Policy: the Initial Reinvention of Classical Dance

The cultural policy of each government was influential in shaping the aesthetic of Thai performance. As a result of the new government, the cultural policy during the new order emphasised the development of national culture based on elite tradition and classical dance. In this section my aim is to examine the activities and strategies of nationalist policies by tracing and analysing cultural policy in the revival of classical dance in the 1940s which greatly impacted on reconstruction of traditional Thai dance. I argue that the new cultural policy formally initiated the power of the State to monopolise, standardise and propagate Thai classical dance in Thai society.

Elite and State

In the mid-1940s, prior to the end of World War II, dance drama was in recession. Many scholars (Yupho, 1963: III; Rutnin, 1993) claim that court dance style deteriorated after it became the responsibility of the Fine Arts Department during the Luang Wichit regime, because most productions were performed in the style of Luang Wichit's plays, which did not require highly skilled levels of dancing. At that time, there were only 4 or 5 performers of *Khon* and no more than ten classical dancers in the Fine Arts Department (Yupho, 1963 : IV). Thai elites were concerned that without the constant revival of court dance, *Khon* and *Lakhon* would disappear for good. According to the record of H.R.H Prince Bhanuphan Yugala, the Head of the Dance and Music division in 1947, who analysed the problems with *Khon* and *Lakhon* practices, graduate students from the Academy of Dance and Music from the Luang Wichit Regime were not skilled:

Khon

At this time, there were few *Khon* Artists in the Fine Arts Department who were skillful such as Aram Intharanat, Arkom Sayakom, Kri Worasarin and Rurkchai Tongphem and some junior artists. Nothing was transmitted to any new generations. I was concerned

that if those governors retired or died, *Khon* in the Fine Arts Department would disappear [. . .] we should preserve and develop it. Even though it might not be developed as well as in reign of King Rama VI, a standard just equal to the dance in the reign of King Rama VII would be fine.

Lakhon

Does not include dance masters; our dance drama dancers were not qualified. Without any blame on the student, because students studied for only two hours a week. They finished school with insufficient skill, and then they abandoned their training because they danced only on a few occasions. Thus it was easy to forget because their dance skill was not profound.

(So.Tho.0701.1/49:15-16²⁷) translated by author

From 1944 to 1945, during the term of Prime Minister Khuang Abhaiwongse, the government realised the importance of traditional performance. The project of improving the teaching and maintenance of traditional dance and music was therefore officially established in 1946 with close supervision by H.R.H. Prince Bhunupan Yugala. The government then appointed a committee including H.R.H Prince Wan Kromamun Narathip Pongprapan as the Chairman, H.R.H Prince Bhanupan, H.R.H. Prince Prem Purachatra, Phya Anuman (the General Director of the Fine Arts Department), and other notable people as the members (2 So.Tho.2/25²⁸). Dhanit Yupho, as a Head of the Division of Dance and Music, was appointed to join this team as the Secretary of the committee (Yupho, 1963: IV). It is interesting to note that the majority of the committee was elite or aristocratic; consequently, court dance rather than folk dance was prioritised for promotion because of the committee's experience and taste.

²⁷ So.Tho.0701.1/49. The personal documents of Bhanuphan Yukhon, the General Director of Fine Arts Department. (เอกสารส่วนตัว อธิบดีกรมศิลปากร พระองค์เจ้าภาณุพันธุ์ยุคล)

²⁸ The committee of the project to improve and development of dance and music also included M.L. Udom Sanitwong, Praya Anirut Taywa, Pra Terasran Witsawakam, MR. J.A. Kakan.

Although classical dance was under government administration, at the first stage, it still had the sense of the elite support. In the initial part of the project of revivalism, the government did not provide a sufficient budget to support this project, even though there were clear aims that it should operate as cultural policy. Prince Bhanupan had to provide backing from his personal finances to produce the performances; for example, covering the costs of making new costumes and repairing the old theatre. As Dhanit Yupho described:

We had to make do with that old thinned roof Silapakorn auditorium by repairing some part of it during the waiting time for the government to sanction the building of a new theatre. But even the money for repairing only some parts of it, we could not get. Prince Bhanupan had to sacrifice his personal finances for this mercy call.

(Yupho,1963: V-VI)

The project of reviving traditional dance was mainly operated and purposed by Prince Bhanupan Yugala, Deputy General Director of the Fine Arts Department, who was the main supervisor of this project. He offered the proposal of the project to the new government by laying out the cultural plan of reviving the traditional performing arts with three main concerns: revival and improvement, creation and propagation, and standardisation. Suggested as an urgent task during the first phase was the revival and development of Thai traditional dance. The planning of cultural activities was divided into many tasks (2So.Tho.2/25²⁹, 1945:1); for example, the establishment Office of Performing Arts as an independent entity with 4 subdivisions—the Central Division or Academic Centre, The School of Dramatic Arts, Thai Music Division and Western Music Division—elevated the status of artists by increasing their position and salary, gathering the former leading dancers of the Royal household's troupes to train a new generation,

²⁹ (2 So.Tho.2/25) The project of improvement of Dance Drama and music in the Office of Performing Arts (การปรับปรุงการละครและดนตรีในกองการสังคีต)

reforming the School of Dance and Music and expanding it to a higher standard, modifying and modernising Thai traditional dance and music, rehearsing the grand performance for official occasions, and producing the music and performance for the public (Ibid: 8-24). Prince Bhanuphan described the reasons for the decision to modify traditional dance:

National art is the high art that we are attempting to preserve which at the same time, needs to be adapted and modernised because generally, if it was frozen and undeveloped, it would deteriorate. The art of Thai dance drama and music, even though it is a high art, if watched, listened to, and performed regularly and repeatedly without any adaptation, would appear boring. Adaptation is in fact most difficult. The artist who can adapt and improve needs to be a true specialist in those arts and love the arts. It is necessary to adapt and modify otherwise it will not develop. Lack of development is the mark of death for our arts. (2) So.Tho.2/25) translated by author

The second phase was designated as the most important step to preserve and maintain dance as a national art. Central to this was the construction of a building for the dance institutions and the National Theatre, as well as making new costumes for *Khon* and *Lakhon*. In addition, the task was also to create a record of dance and disseminate it by publishing dance documents and a film of the revived dance movement practices as a collection of the official 'formula' for dance notation (Ibid: 24-27). In the final phase, the purpose of this step was to develop dance artists and elevate traditional dance as a career path stable in Thai society, and to promote traditional dancing to a global level. There were three plans for this phase; to establish a dance company by cooperating with private dance troupes, to send the performing artists to observe dance activities and train abroad, and to send dance troupes to perform overseas to promote classical dance (Ibid:27-34).

However, this project was obstructed in the first stage because of political infighting. After a year in operating the project, when the new government came to office, Prince Bhanuphan had to resign (Yupho, 1963: IV). Dhanit Yupho, as a Head of Dance and Music Division in that time, had to be in charge of this project instead. He explained how political struggles affected the project:

It was under these circumstances, that I had to continue our work promoting the arts. All sorts of obstacles almost prevented me from accomplishing our proposed project in the fixed time. There were occasions when I had to follow the misleading orders of the powerful but inartistic politicians, and sometimes I had to readjust our planned work to suit the desires of my various superiors. There were also times when I had to abandon our original plan for a while and patiently wait for restarting it at some later date. However, no matter how things were, I never ceased to try to make progress with the original project. Because of all these difficulties, the promotion of Thai art of dancing and music had to advance so slowly that it took more time than it should, and even now much has yet to be accomplished. This delay of the action of the project has caused some damage to the arts. i.e on 9 November 1960 the Silapakorn Theatre was burnt down before the new national theatre could be built.

(Yupho, 1963: IV)

In 1952, traditional art and culture became one arena of political policy in Prime Minister Phibun's regime, and the project of promoting dance and music had been dramatically supported (Phuchadaphirom, 2007:97). During that time, Dhanit Yupho was the key figure in the success of revival traditional dance because he was the main worker running this project for over twenty years as a Secretary of the Committee when the project began and later took office as the Head of the Dance and Music Division during 1946-1956 and as the General-Director of the Fine Arts Department from 1956-1968. During his tenure, the mission of the project was completed; for example, dance artists were promoted and

their salary was increased; The National Theatre was built in 1960; the School of Dance and Music was systemised and expanded to teach up to the level of Higher Education; dance documents were officially published; and *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance dramas have been regularly produced at the national theatre and for official occasions both inside and outside the country. Thus, since then, the Office of Performing Arts has become the centre and controls the classical performing arts in Thai society.

The State Monopoly in Classical Dance: the Reformation of National Dance Institution

The reformation of the Office of Performing Arts and School of Dramatic Arts in 1945 was of profound significance and played a central role in the process of reconstruction, transmission and propagation of Thai classical dance in modern times. In the past, traditional dance styles used to be varied and there were few restrictions on performance practices; dance was being developed, adapted and modified all the time. When the Office of Performing Arts and the School of Dramatic Arts were established and became the only institutions permitted to perform and teach classical dance in Thailand, all classical dances became codified more strictly and were to be propagated only from these sources. This watershed moment in the history of dance, I argue, has had a long-lasting impact on the development of Thai dance and shows the power of the state in homogenising Thai culture.

In the beginning of the 1950s, when the state greatly supported the project of revivalism, the Office of Performing Arts reorganised by dividing the office into eight subdivisions: Academic Centre, Division of Thai Music, Division of Western Music, Division of Dance, Division of Production, Division of Costume, Division of Stage Management, and The School of Dramatic Arts to train the student in all kind of performing arts

(So.Tho.0701.9.1/14³⁰). The Office of Performing Arts was responsible for the preservation of classical, traditional music and dance drama. It also researched and propagated Thai performing arts, producing and performing music and dance in public for official occasions, and promoted Thai traditional dance and music abroad. Under the Office of Performing Arts, the School of Dramatic Arts became responsible for teaching and training the students to perform for the Fine Arts Department's productions (So.Tho.0701.9.1/10³¹). From then until the present, the Office of Performing Arts has continually operated projects to develop and promote Thai classical dance and has become the centre of Thai performing arts.

The other significant factor of the state's attempt to centralise Thai dance was the process of gathering experienced and skillful dance artists to the Fine Arts Department. In order to revive ancient dance drama, the government aimed to invite dancers from many royal households and dance troupes to pass down their knowledge of dancing to the students at the School of Dramatic Arts, and produce performances for the Fine Arts Department. The royal dancer was employed as the civil officer under the Office of Performing Arts. As Prince Bhanupan proposed:

In order to preserve the arts, it is necessary to gather all Thai artists who were skilful in royal court art and raise the salary enough for them to survive. Simply, we need to treat them as if they have royal patronage. In the past, if they were not treated like this, the arts would disappear because ancient arts such as *Khon*, *Lakhon* and *Nangyai* offer limited work. Consequently, few people would be willing to apply for training in this career. There was only the contribution from the government to support them as national arts.

(2So.tho.2/25³²:26) translated by author

³⁰ So.Tho.0701.9.1/14 the duty of division in the Office of Performing Arts (หน้าที่ของกองต่างๆในกรมศิลปากร)

³¹ So.Tho.0701.9.1/10 the reconstruction of the Official place and the project for 5 years 1948-1952 (การบูรณะสถานที่ราชการและโครงการดำเนินงาน 5 ปี 2491-2495)

³² 2So.tho.2/25³².The Project of improvement of dance and music in the Office of Performing Arts

Since then, the Fine Arts Department has become the main patron of classical dancers and the centre for various classical dancer. As a result, creative processes and the myriad styles of dance drama were centralised only in this national dance troupe. As discussed in Chapter One, when the Fine Arts Department first established the School of Dramatic Arts in 1934, royal dancers from different households were invited to teach there, such as Khru Lomoon Yamakup from Suankularb Palace, Mom Khru Tuan (Suparak Pataranawik) from Chao Phraya Tawet dance troupe, and Khru Monlee Kongprapat from Chaokaow Palace under Princess Watchaleewong. When the government started running the project of revivalism in 1945, Dhanit Yupho, the then Head of the Office of Performing Arts, persuaded more expert dancers who were alive during that time to join this mission; for example, Khru Phan Malakul from Chaokhunphra Prayunlawong Dance Troupe, Madam Paew Snidvongsene from Suankularb Palace (Yupho,1963:V). These traditional dancers had differing training backgrounds and different experiences of performing. When they were employed under the Office of Performing Arts, they had to harmonise and share their experiences to produce dance drama under the name of the Fine Arts Department and formalise the traditional training in the dance curriculum of the School of Dramatic Arts. It was evident why the diversity of dance style was unified by the state under the Office of Performing Arts, The Fine Arts Department.

After the state initiated the project of revival, the number of traditional dances under the Fine Arts Department training greatly increased and were disseminated across Thai society. The Fine Arts Department attempted to encourage new generations to study at the School of Dramatic Art and elevate the status of dancers by offering a salary for students to work as reserve artists of the Office of Performing Arts. Moreover, the Fine Arts Department also offered scholarships to the students from the countryside to study classical dance if they wanted to be dance teachers in their provinces

(So.Tho.0701.9.1/11:79³³). The result of this process not only increased the number of dance students choosing to participate in this school, but also encouraged a shift in public perceptions about being a dancer, as evidenced by the rapidly increased number of dance students since 1951. The evidence below shows the policy regarding the salary of the students:

The prospects of the students who complete their studies at this school

[N]evertheless the department may employ some of them under it as artistes according to needs of the government. With the permission of the Office of the Prime Minister the department has come to an understanding with the Civil Service Commission and the latter had issued a regulation to the following effect fixing the status of the students who complete their education at this school:-

When employed by the Department of Fine Arts

1. Students who have passed the sixth standard of the preliminary course in dramatic art are to be exempted from competitive examinations and appointed ordinary officials of the fourth grade on a salary of 30 baht.
2. Students who have passed the second standard of the intermediate course in dramatic art are to be exempted from competitive examinations and appointed ordinary officials of the fourth grade on a salary of 45 baht
3. The department of Fine Arts will obtain the permission of the Office of the Prime Minister and come to an agreement with the Civil Service Commission to appoint students who have passed the third standard of the advanced course in dramatic art ordinary officials of the third grade on a salary of 90 baht on the same standing as persons who have obtained Secondary School Teachers' certificates, Bachelors' degrees or diplomas. (No.So.Tho.0701/328:7³⁴)

³³ So.Tho.0701.9.1/11:79 the annual report in education and performing of the Division of Dance 1950 (รายงานการศึกษาและการแสดงของแผนกนาฏศิลป์ ประจำปี 2493)

³⁴ No.So.Tho.0701/328 Education: the "Worship of The Teachers" and the Staging of Miscellaneous Plays at the School of Dramatic Art of the Department of Fine Arts, 1949

In 1954, as a part of the project to disseminate and propagate classical dance to the public, the Music and Dance Public Organisation was established as an independent entity in order to produce classical dance and music in Thai society, and to support dancers and dance students from the School of Dance and Music (So.Tho.0701.39/10:16³⁵). This Public Organisation aimed to replace the Division of Dance and Music and was separated from the Fine Arts Department in order to make management easier. However, the Public Organisation was not entirely separate from the Fine Arts Department because the Head of the Organisation was the General Director of the Fine Arts Department and the committee members were also government officials. At the first ceremony establishing this organisation, Luang Ronasithiphichai, the General Director of the Fine Arts Department, announced to parents and students that this organisation would be the main workplace for dance graduates to relieve them from unemployment (Ko.Po7.1955.So.tho3:11³⁶). Nevertheless, in 1962, when the new government took office, the cultural policy changed; as a result, this Public Organisation was closed down and all its tasks and duties were returned to the Office of Performing Arts.

Propagation of Traditional Dance: Transformation of Classical Dance

The other significant impact on the transformation of classical dance, particularly in its function, was the policy of propagation of classical dance to the public. According to cultural policy during the project of revival classical dance, shown below, traditional dance was used as a tool to promote Thai culture for the international tourist market. Due to its economic purpose, the court dance style gradually changed its function from being royal entertainment or royal regalia to serve popular audiences and tourism instead.

³⁵ So.Tho.0701.39/10 Royal Decree of the establishment of the Music and Dance Public Organisation 1954 (พระราชกฤษฎีกาจัดตั้งองค์การดุริยางค์นาฏศิลป์ 2497)

³⁶ Ko.Po7.1955.So.Tho3:11 the Production of Public Organisation 'Manorah', Theadthai newspaper, 20 February, 1955 (ละครขององค์การ, มโนราห์ จาก หนังสือพิมพ์เดอะไทย 20 กุมภาพันธ์ 2498)

The propagation of dance and music was the responsibility of the Fine Arts Department which should not be limited only to our country, but, as our main point indicates, should also be propagated abroad. Understandably, this project easily affirms that our art is a high elegant art which would be amazing for foreigners. The other point is that westerners tend to be interested in eastern arts. Propagating our arts abroad would be advantageous for the honour of the nation and economic growth.

(2So.Tho.2/25³⁷:33) translated by author

It is significant that the policy of performing dance abroad has effected a lot of change in Thai classical dance especially in the creation of dance drama, which shifted as a process from creating a whole production, to producing short dance pieces instead. It is undeniable that when the target audience changed from Thais to foreigners, classical dance had to adapt to suit the taste of its audience. As a result, newly-invented dance pieces from dance drama productions were performed individually and this resulted in a new tendency to create short dance pieces, instead of choreographing a whole dance drama.

On 12 October, 25 dancers from the Fine Arts Department showcased Thai classical dance and music at the World Fair, which was held in Seattle, USA. The troupe then performed in San Francisco and Hawaii. The Fine Arts Department adapted this performance, to suit foreign taste, so the movements were not slow and the performance did not last very long, as it used to in the past, but it was still completely maintained as traditional Thai Art. It is believed that this governmental dance troupe will encourage foreigners to visit Thailand.

(Pimthai newspaper, 14 October, 1962) translated by author

³⁷2So.Tho.2/25 the Project of improvement dance drama and music in the Office of Performing Arts, the Fine Arts Department (โครงการปรับปรุงศิลปะการละครและดนตรีในกองการสังคีต กรมศิลปากร)

During the period of the 1960s through the efforts of Dhanit, the General-Director of the Fine Arts Department, classical dance was dramatically promoted to be performed in many countries, such as Myanmar, Rome, Japan, Philippine, United State, Singapore, India, Vietnam, Malaysia, Italy, and Indonesia (So.Tho.0701.40.3³⁸). From this cultural exchange programme, the Fine Arts Department was successful in promoting Thai classical dance for public performance. There was much admiration from journalists who supported this project by publishing it in many newspapers. The statement below shows the examples of complementary newspaper articles.

The investment in promoting classical dance troupes to perform overseas should be one of governmental policy, because it is an investment and promotion for economic benefit; for example, it has indirectly promoted foreigners to travel and spend their money in Thailand, as well as advertising Thailand to the world”.

(Pimthai newspaper, 14 October, 1962) translated by author

Performing Classical Dance in the USA strengthen our relationship more effectively than diplomacy [. . .] Report from Seattle: the classical dance troupe from the Fine Arts Department performing in the USA is held in such high regard that only a week of performing can promote international relation better than a whole year is work by the ambassadors”

(Saimnikorn newspaper, 2 November, 1962) translated by author

As a result of the success in promoting Thai culture, the policy of performing overseas has continued to be supported by the government until the present. The traditional Thai dance was represented as ‘traditional’ and as a national export, but was newly formed in many ways. It can be said that until now, traditional dance has changed its function so as

³⁸ So.Tho.0701.40.3 The Office of Performing Arts, Thai dance performing in oversea (กองการสังคีต นาฏศิลป์ไทยไปต่างประเทศ)

not only to be preserved as an essential part of Thai identity, but also to become an art object commodified in and by the commercial world of cultural tourism.

Publication and Codification of Thai Classical Dance

As the 1940s was the decade of an initial revival phase of classical dance, the period between the 1950s and 1960s was one when court dance transformed into a Thai classical tradition. The movement style of court performance assumed significance in Thai cultural policy, and was propagated widely across Thai society. This section turns to the significant activities of the project of cultural revivalism that were undertaken to perform and publicise Thai traditional dance drama as symbols of a constructed quality of Thai-ness. I mainly focus on the publication and texts concerning dance knowledge which were published by the Fine Arts Department. This thesis is then fundamentally focussed on the process of how the state plays an important role in writing dance history and dance knowledge, and how those histories have been transmitted in the present day.

Making Dance History and Setting Standard of Dance Knowledge

The invisible period of the construction of Thai dance history runs through the 1940s and 1950s when court dance and cultural policies concerning dance knowledge were revived. The Fine Arts Department played an important role in writing the history of classical dance as its purpose was to revive national art. One of the main factors in setting the standards and reconstructing Thai classical dance was publication. This publication included the texts and programmes of dance drama performances. The Fine Arts Department realised that using written works could have a great impact on people. It can be said that this policy was the beginning of the standardisation of forms of dance knowledge. H.R.H Prince Bhanupan described how important compiling dance text books was in the proposal of the project:

In terms of publishing dance text books, the aim is not only to compile a collection of text books such as *Tamra Fon Ram* (manual for the training of dancers) which was composed by Krom Phraya Damrong Rajanubhab, but also to record music and singing onto disc and film as well as to preserve dance movements and the posture of playing Thai instruments. These elaborate dance movements and lyrics are difficult to learn. When the dance masters disappear from the scene in the future, we will still have these archives to turn to.

(2)So.Tho.2/25³⁹:35) translated by author

The purpose of publication was not only to propagate classical dance in Thai society, but also to preserve the texts as archives for future dance education. As Luang Rounsitchai, the General Director of the Fine Arts Department in that period (1950-1955) mentioned in the preface of the report onto Ngan Sang Khit Sin Project:

The academic evidence of each division was embedded in the person who was the former officer. When they retired or died, the academic evidence also dissolved . . . so those arts did not gain popularity among people except those who were really interested. Yet, their training might not be as accurate as it should be [. . .] [W]hen I worked as the General-Director, I considered gathering all academic evidence from all departments to become a repository for study and practice in the future. So, I assigned the head and the officers who were professional in each division to research and compile the written work [. . .] some topics which I considered propagating to people were broadcast on radio or published in daily or periodical newspapers. As a result of this work, there has emerged a growing interest in the national arts among Thai people.

(The Fine Arts Department, *Ngan Sang Khit Sin*, 1951: I) translated by author

³⁹ 2So.Tho.2/25 the Project of improvement dance drama and music in the Office of Performing Arts, the Fine Arts Department (โครงการปรับปรุงศิลปะการละครและดนตรีในกองการสังคีต กรมศิลปากร)

It is interesting to note that prior to the revival of traditional dance there was very little serious work written or published about dance and the performing arts. The earliest documents of Thai classical dance were descriptive, written by court scholars and artists of approved high standard court performances. In 1947, the Fine Arts Department had on its hands a project to edit and publish the collection of dance text books by gathering the studies written by these former court and elite scholars, as mentioned earlier. The oldest and most referenced sources of ancient Thai theatre were written by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, a renowned court scholar, who is revered as the father of Thai history. He wrote *Tamnan Lakhon Inao (A Play on the Legend of Inao)* in 1921, *Tamra Fon Ram* (a dance training text) in 1923 and *Tamnan Lakhon Dukdamban (A Dance Drama on the Legend of Dukdumban)* in 1924. He provided a fresh scholarly approach to the study of Thai Theatre and an adopted western historical methodology to form a hypotheses about its origins and development. He based his assumption on written sources, his own experience in court and also interviewed old court artists (Witayasakpan, 1992:8). Later scholars rely on his observations and insight. Conversely, some scholars such as Rutnin (1993:44) and Eoseewong (2005) claim that his works contain only speculations and assumptions, most of them lacking historical proof. However, it is important to note that these dance text books of Prince Damrong remain standard, frequently quoted and new editions have still been continuously printed from the period of revivalism to today. As Witayasakpan (1992:7) points out:

In the very hierarchical Thai society, questioning the validity of the sources or scholarship of the works was condemned as an improper and disrespectful; as a result, most studies of Thai theatre provided by earlier authorities are repetitions of descriptions with no change nor argument.

After embarking on the project of dance publication, with a limited budget for publication, the Fine Arts Department initiated a dissemination of the knowledge of Thai culture by

publishing a journal. In 1947, the *Sinlapakorn* Journal was launched every two months to propagate Thai history, literature, arts and archaeology to public (So.Tho.0701.1.1/17⁴⁰). During the period of 1947-1950, a great number of articles on dance began to circulate in *Sinlapakorn*, which were mainly written by Dhanit Yupho; for example, ‘A Tip to Produce *Lakhon Dukkamban*’ (1947:24-31), ‘The Prelude of Thai Dance’ (1947:35-43), ‘The Primary Course of Training in Thai Classical Dance’ (1948: 5-44), ‘The Initial Masters and Artists of Thai Dance Drama in the Thonburi Period’ (1948:36-47), ‘In the Rattanakosin Period’ (1949:29-35), ‘The Evolution of *Khon*’ (1949:48-64), ‘The Origin of *Khon*’ (1949:38-44), ‘The Costumes of *Khon* and *Lakhon* Dance Dramas’ (1951:44-60) and so forth. At the beginning of the 1950s, traditional culture was greatly promoted by the state, which then allocated a larger budget to the Fine Arts Department. Consequently, these articles were gathered to be published in many books of the Fine Arts Department; for instance, *The Primary Course of Training in Thai Theatrical Art* in 1952, *The Khon* in 1953, and *Artists of Thai Dance Drama* in 1962.

The programmes of dance drama performances comprised another source that the Fine Arts Department used as a means of producing dance knowledge. As previously noted, tourists and contemporary audiences were the main targets for promoting traditional dance; thus, the Fine Arts Department used the programmes to provide information about classical dances as Dhanit Yupho stated in the preface of the programme of *Khon* and *Lakhon*, which is shown below. It is interesting to note that the content of programmes accompanying the performances which were published in this period remains unchanged till today. These programmes and publications initiated a standardisation of the knowledge of Thai classical dance and dance genres, which I discuss in the following section.

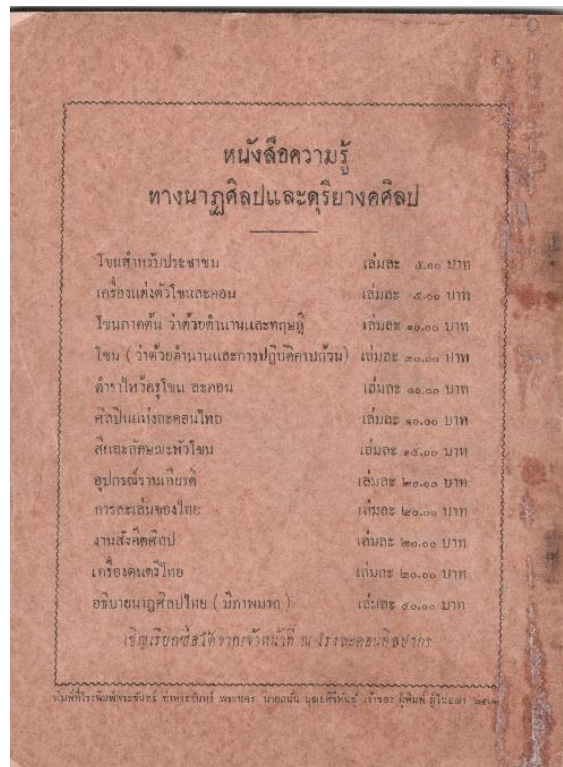
⁴⁰So.Tho.0701.1.1/17 The improvement of official administration of the Fine Arts Department (การปรับปรุงส่วนราชการในกรมศิลปากร)

But after the World War II, the situation changed. There were many more foreigners visiting Thailand and quite a number of them were interested in Thai dancing and music and quite contradictorily, the new generation of Thai took less interest in their own traditional art. They could not even follow the story of the performance. The programmes of the performances thus had to be made in both Thai and English. We hoped this would gradually fill in the gaps in knowledge of the general public and help them appreciate more fully the Thai art of dancing and music [. . .] I am quite certain that these programmes play an important role in the task of explaining and promoting the national Thai art of dancing and music which is now enjoying a worldwide popularity.

(Yupho, 1963: VII).

The main figure in building a body of dance knowledge was Dhanit Yupho, who effectively promoted classical dance through his academic texts, essays, speeches and programs of *Khon* and *Lakhon*. These historical books have been frequently cited and highly respected by teachers and students. *The Explanation of Traditional Dance*, the first official dance publication written by Dhanit—first published in 1948—presented the synopsis of various traditional dances as a guidance for people who interested in Thai dance (Yupho, 1948a). In the beginning of 1950s, the Fine Arts Department was aware of recording of the knowledge in Thai performing arts in order to preserve and educate newer generations; thus, the book entitled *Ngan Sang Khit Sin Khong Krom Sinlapakorn 1949-1951* (Performing Art of the Fine Arts Department 1949-1951) was published. This book contained a great number of articles written by many eminent dance masters concerning dance pedagogy, the difficulty of dance training and the process of the creation of dance drama productions from 1949 to 1951. Afterwards, the Fine Arts Department continued publishing a great number of dance text books both in Thai and English versions, and sold them at the National Theatre; for example, *Thai Musical Instruments* (1948), *Education, the Worship of the Teachers and the Staging of*

Miscellaneous Plays at the School of Dramatic Art of the Department of Fine Arts (1949), The Preliminary Course of Training in Thai Theatrical Art (1952), The Classical Siamese Theatre (1952), Khon for people: Preliminary Khon: Legend and theory (1953), Colour and Feature of Khon Mask (1953), Ramwong Songs (1957), Pictorial Figures Depicting Basic Postures of Thai Dancing, The Khon (Masked Play) (1960), The Custom and Rite of Paying Homage to teachers of Khon, Lakhon and Piphat (1961), and The Attire of Khon and Lakhon. Some of these books have run to more than five editions throughout the last two decades and were used to teach the students in the School of Dramatic Arts.



หนังสือความรู้ทางนาฏศิลป์และดุริยางคศิลป์	
ใจสั่งมาวิชาละคร	เล่มละ ๓.๐๐ บาท
เครื่องแต่งตัวโขนและละคร	เล่มละ ๔.๐๐ บาท
ใจนึกถนัด ว่าด้วยค่านามและทฤษฎี	เล่มละ ๒๐.๐๐ บาท
โขน (ว่าด้วยค่านามและการปฏิบัติตามธรรมเนียม)	เล่มละ ๒๐.๐๐ บาท
คำให้การด้วยโขน ละคร	เล่มละ ๑๐.๐๐ บาท
ศิลป์แห่งละครของไทย	เล่มละ ๑๐.๐๐ บาท
ศิลปะการละครของไทย	เล่มละ ๑๐.๐๐ บาท
อุปกรณ์การละคร	เล่มละ ๒๐.๐๐ บาท
การละเล่นของไทย	เล่มละ ๒๐.๐๐ บาท
งานศิลปศึกษา	เล่มละ ๒๐.๐๐ บาท
เครื่องดนตรีไทย	เล่มละ ๒๐.๐๐ บาท
อธิบายนาฏศิลป์ไทย (นิทานนาฏ)	เล่มละ ๑๐.๐๐ บาท

จัดพิมพ์โดยสำนักพิมพ์ศิลปวัฒนธรรม กรุงเทพมหานคร

Figure 2.1. The List of Books published by the Fine Arts Department have an advertisement of all publications and the prices they were sold at in the national theatre. Image courtesy of the Fine Arts Department

In the mid-1950s, in order to promote Thai culture, the government aimed to publicise Thai arts and culture, including Thai dance, for the purpose of demonstrating Thai identity. This publication was promoted in print mostly for foreigners as a way of

promoting Thailand as a rich cultured nation. The Thailand Culture Series, a set of pamphlets on Thai art and culture, was published in English. This monograph series was issued by the National Institute of Culture, established in 1942, and contained several studies of dance and dance drama. There were seventeen monographs in the series ⁴¹ published in 1955, and the series was changed to Thai Cultural. A new series published increased the number to twenty-five monographs⁴² in 1957. Amongst them, there were six monographs about Thai performance and music; for example, *Shadow Play, the Khon, Khon Masks, The Custom and Rite of Paying Homage to Teachers of Khon, Lakhon and Piphat, The Preliminary Course of Training in Thai Theatrical Art*, and *Thai Music*.

Interestingly, five editions of this new cultural series have been republished from the 1960s to the 1990s, and the recent edition published in 2015 has not been altered, apart from the addition of a few illustrations. This is the reason why dance knowledge and history produced in the Fine Arts Department has remained powerful in Thai society. In other words, The Fine Arts Department succeeded in promoting and raising the cultural value of *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance dramas. Consequently, they are classical Thai dance

⁴¹ The 17 monographs in cultural series: 1. The Cultures of Thailand 2. A brief Survey of Cultural Thailand 3. Thai literature & Swasderaksa 4. Thai Architecture and Painting 5. Loy Kratong and Songkran festival 6. Chothi & Some Tradition of Thai 7. Phra Cedi 8. Thai Music 9. Thai Images of the Buddha 10. Thai Buddhist Sculpture 11. The Khon (Mask Play) 12. The Nang (Shadow Play) 13. The Story of Thai Marriage Customs 14. Modern Arts in Thailand 15. The Preliminary Course of Training in Thai Theatrical Art 16. Life in Bangkok 17. Thai language (see Thamrongsak, Pramuan: 391).

⁴² The 25 monographs in cultural new series as follows: 1. Introduction Culture Thailand in Outline by Phya Anuman Rajadhon, 2. The Royal Monasteries and Their Significance by Luang Boribai Buribhand & A.B. Griswold, 3. Shadow Play (The Nang) by H.H. Prince Dhaninivat Kromamun Bidyalabh Bridhyakorn, 4. Thai Buddhist Art (Architecture) by Professor Silpa Bhirasri 5. Thai Lacquer Works by Professor Silpa Bhirasri, 6. The Khon by H.H. Prince Dhaninivat Kromamun Bidyalabh Bridhyakorn 7. Khon Mask & Dhanit Yupho, 8. Contemporary Arts in Thailand by Professor Silpa Bhirasri, 9. Thai Literature in Relation to the Diffusion of Her Cultures by Phaya Numan Rajadhon, 10. The Nature and Development of the Thai Language by Phya Anuman Rajadhon, 11. The Custom and Rite of Paying Homage to Teachers of Khon, Lakhon and Piphat by Dhanit Yupho, 12. Thai Wood Carvings by Professor Silpa Bhirasri, 13. The Preliminary Course of Training in Thai Theatrical Art, 14. Thai traditional Salutation, 15. Thai Music by Phra Chen Duriyanga, 16. Thai Music in Western Notation by Phra Chen Duriyanga, 17. An Appreciation of Sukhothai Art by Professor Silpa Bhirasri, 18. Thai Images or Thai Buddha by Luang Boribai Buribhand & A.B. Griswold, 19. What is Buddha Image? By A.B. Griswold, 20. Thai Traditional Painting by Elizabeth Lyons, 21. Theet Maha Chat by Phya Anuman Rajadhon, 22. The Tosachat in Thai Painting by Elizabeth Lyons, 23. The Royal Palaces by H.H. Prince Dhaninivat Kromamun Bidyalabh Bridhyakorn, 24. The Development of the National Museums in Thailand by Dhanit Yupho, 25. Dharmachakra (The Wheel of the Law) by Dhanit Yupho.

forms respected as genres of high art, containing a strong sense of sacredness in relation to the monarchy. This perception can be glimpsed in the many customs and rituals which are a part of dance practice today.

Re-invented Neo-Traditional Dance from 1945-1960s

Throughout these reflections on the various issues of cultural policy, I suggest marking the ground on which the practiced forms of Thai classical dance were shaped as what Hobsbawm and Ranger (2015) have called ‘the invention of tradition’. As Hobsbawm and Ranger (2015:4) indicate, ‘Inventing traditions, it is assumed here, is essentially a process of formalisation and ritualization, characterised by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition’. In the case of Thailand, not all revival productions of classical dance were invented because some of them were passed on from generation to generation by experienced royal dancers.

However, this period of revivalism is significant in shaping the adapted form of traditional dance drama. I argue that some of the classical dance drama which we perform and teach today at schools and universities is the result of neoclassical reconstruction. In order to understand this situation, this section focusses on the first theatrical events in which the *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance dramas were staged in modern times, specifically the Fine Arts Department’s productions as examples of the reinvented and reconstructed Thai classical dance genres. I mainly analyse the adaptation and modernisation processes of the *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance dramas during the revival period, after which they have been continually preserved as classical dances.

Prior to the revival of classical dance, the form of dance drama and its practice varied and developed over time according to the context, rather than being fixed as a genre. It was problematic when the Fine Arts Department attempted to revive ancient dance and

separate dance drama genres by using the historical sources which they were based on.

Rutnin (1975: III) claims that:

The deconstruction of traditional dance has been a gradual process resulting from political and social change in the modern age. As the result of revival, many of the dramatic forms have disappeared and some of them have had to change and adapt their themes, and even their forms, to suit the process of modernization.

Moreover, as the result of cultural policy aimed at preserving Thai traditional dance, this reinvented classical dance has been firmly maintained by government structures which have brought about the fixing of the dance drama form and the rigid development of dance drama.

The Reconstruction of Dance Drama

From the mid-1940s to 1960s, the Fine Arts Department undertook a project to revive traditional performance by attempting to bring dance drama from the past to the present. This project first started in 1946 as a part of the cultural policy to propagate Thai classical dance to the public. The main activity of this event was to organise annual dance productions every weekend, the original purpose of which was to perform four productions for the six months after the rainy season from mid-November to May (So.Tho.0701.9.2/3:7⁴³). During the first phase of the revival, the Fine Arts Department produced a great number of ancient *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance dramas by using dramatic plays, which constituted the material performed in the past. For example, in 1946 three episodes were performed in *Khon: Maiyarab the Magician, the Promas, and the Nagabas*, in 1947 an episode of *Frustration of Ceremony for the Preparation of The Elixir of Life* was performed in *Khon*, and an episode from *King Khun Phan Visits the Continent* in *Lakhon Dukkamban*, and in 1948 five productions were performed: *Ineo, Khon- Floating*

⁴³So.Tho.0701.9.2/3 The Annual report of the Fine Arts Department (ผลการปฏิบัติงานของกรมศิลปากร)

Lady, Saviti, Phra Law and Unaruth. After reviving these ancient dance productions, there were very small audiences; therefore, the number of productions were reduce to only two or three months per year (Ibid: 7).

As the result of lacking audiences, the Fine Arts Department had a change in strategy to promote dance drama by producing the various productions every year by modifying and modernising the dramatic play instead of performing the traditional one. Court dance style was no longer presented, as it had been intended to suit the taste of the elite who used to patronise the court dance. It was modified in order to attempt to attract popular audiences instead. The full length performances of earlier times were shortened to approximately three hours so as not to bore the audience. As Yupho described the revival of dance drama in his preface to the programme of *Khon* and *Lakhon* performances in the Fine Arts Department:

In presenting the masked play and the dance drama, we considered only the episodes or the items which were scholarly considered to have good technique, and were worthy of the Thai art of dancing so that both students could learn and the public could enjoy. Consequently, the episodes of either *Khon* or *Lakon* have not been arranged in the order of the original story. We also modified the items to conform to the taste of the audience, which consisted of both Thais and foreigners, and at the same time still retained the standard of Thai classical dancing.

(Yupho,1963: IV).

As a result of adapting dance drama and heavy marketing and promotion by the Fine Arts Department, the numbers of audiences dramatically increased from 34,779 in 1949, 45,594 in 1950, 49,558 in 1951 and 88,179 in 1952, respectively (So.Tho.0701.1.1/17:6⁴⁴). The revenues were significantly raised from just 50,403.92

⁴⁴ So.Tho.0701.1.1/17 The improvement of the official of the Fine Arts department
(การปรับปรุงส่วนราชการในกรมศิลปากร)

Thai-baht in 1946 to 432,691.00 Thai-baht in 1951 as evidenced in the annual report of the Fine Arts Department (So.Tho.0701.9.2/3⁴⁵). In that time, the Fine Arts Department attempted to promote dance drama by arranging a special performance for the King, nobilities, ministers and government officials, including their families (So.Tho.0701.40/27⁴⁶). This invitation of the elite elevated Thai classical dance to become well-known in Thai society.



Figure 2.2 A large audience watching *The Prince's Golden Conch* at Silpakorn Theatre in 1954. Image courtesy the National Museum Bangkok.

From 1949 to 1950, *Lakhon* dance dramas were revived by adapting the dramatic plays of popular folktales which used to be performed in commercial theatre during the nineteenth century. The dramatic plays of Prince Naradhip, *Phra Law* and *Krai-Thong*, were chosen to perform from December 1948 to January 1949 and Chao Phraya Mahin's adaptation, *Khun Chang-Khun Phan*, was performed in November 1949 (Yupho, 1963:

⁴⁵ So.Tho.0701.9.2/3 The Annual report of the Fine Arts Department 1950 (ผลการปฏิบัติงานของกรมศิลปากร ประจำปี 2493)

⁴⁶ So.Tho.0701.40/27 the invitation to attend the performing arts of the Fine Arts Department 1948-1953 (เชิญชมละครของกรมศิลปากร 2491-2496)

187-258). The productions were not wholly performed as in the past; new dance pieces were created and the production style was constantly changed to attract contemporary audiences.

According to the program of these productions, at that time, the Fine Arts Department had not identified particular genres of dance drama but aimed to present and promote the productions with historical legends from different parts of Thailand; for example, the story of *Phra law*, which was believed to have taken place in the Prae and Lampang provinces (the program of *Phra law*, 1948); *Krai-Thong* took place in the Pichit province (the program of *Krai-Thong*, 1949) ; and *Khun Chang and Khun Phan* was in the Suphanburee province (the program of *Khun Chang and Khun Phan*, 1949). These regional variations were drawn out in the explanation of the relationship between story and the location in the programme. Even though the program mentioned the historical play related to the dance drama style, it did not specify the particular genre, as evidenced below. It reveals that the dance productions, before a standard was set, were varied as a result of combining the different styles of dance elements, the purpose of which was to present the story, rather than the categories of dance drama:

The Play of ‘*Krai Thong*’ composed by Prince Narathip is in what is called ‘*Lakhon Phanthang*’ style which makes it different from all other Siamese plays but is very well suited to the action of the characters since the dances are beautiful and the whole performance is like ‘*Lakhon Nok*’ with features of ‘*Lakhon Nai*’ introduced in certain parts. The melodies to be sung by the players, as well as those that are to be rendered by the instruments, have been modified by the prince, by the addition of some features of the ‘*Sepha*’ so as to suit the action of the characters, make the performance quick and leave room for the introduction of humorous elements according to needs of the story. The play may be considered to be a ‘*Lakhon Sepha*’ too. Many theatrical companies have

staged the play of Prince Narathip and it is widely known. (The Program of *Krai Thong*, 11 of January, 1949:24)

In the past, *Lakhon* was styled variously in accordance with the stories, the dancing style, music, costume and dramatic purpose in question; for example, *Lakhon Nai*, a royal dance drama, was performed with elaborate dance and music for monarchs and elite people, while *Lakhon Nok*, an outside-court dance drama, was performed quickly in a simple dance style, and aimed at popular audiences. It needs to be acknowledged that *Lakhon* dance drama originated as a form of entertainment with the modernisation of Thailand between 1860 and 1910 under the influence of west; many theatre houses were founded, and *Lakhon* was developed by adapting various styles of dance with both traditional and western elements to attract audiences.

Each theatre house attempted to create their own style of production in order to differ from other dance troupes; as the result, a new theatrical form emerged. However, each production still borrowed elements from others to present the story. When dance drama was standardised in this revival period, the various styles of dance drama tended to be fixed as specific genres, as idea of the construction of knowable knowledge illuminates.

Setting the New Standard of Dance Category

The dance drama category was formalised and standardised when the Fine Arts Department historians developed the process of constructing the dances as genres in 1950; as the result, the traditional dances were defined by an unchanging dance style. This is the reason why Thai dance drama today has been specifically divided into five categories with two subcategories; three original dance dramas: *Lakhon Chatri* (Popular dance drama), *Lakhon Nok* (outside-court dance drama), *Lakhon Nai* (court dance drama); and two commercial dance dramas in modernisation period (1860s-1910s): *Lakhon Phanthang* (hybrid dance drama), *Lakhon Dukdamban* (opera dance drama). As Hughes-

Freeland (2006:55) points out, ‘The common practice of fixing the name to a genre that drew on prior conventions and that was then subsequently presented as traditional underlined the fact that tradition is a process, not a thing’. In order to understand how classical dance codified as those genres, I discuss the reinvented productions of the Fine Arts Department that clearly manifest as different dance genres which are still performed at the National Theatre, and are preserved and taught to the new generations today. This section focusses on the reinvention of *Lakhon Nai*, *Lakhon Nok* and *Lakhon Chattri* as they were the original dance dramas of the past.

***Lakhon Nai* and *Lakhon Nok*: Distinctive of Court and Popular Theatre**

As mentioned earlier, in the first period of revival, the *Lakhon* dance genre was not fixed and standardised until the Fine Arts Department presented the dance genres of *Lakhon Nai* and *Lakhon Nok* on stage to demonstrate the difference in aesthetics between court and popular taste. The word *Nai*, means “in” or “inside”, is used together with the word *Lakhon* to indicate that the form of dance drama performed inside the royal court, while *Nok*, meaning “out” or “outside”, is used to classify the drama of the ordinary people performed outside the royal court. In order to show the distinctive features of these two genres, the Fine Arts Department produced the two productions; *Inao: The episode of Prandanta Decoying Doves* to present *Lakhon Nai* first performed on 17 November 1950 and eighty-six times since (Yupho, 1963:143), and *Suwanahoung* was presented in *Lakhon Nok* first on 12 March 1951 and seventy-one times since (Yupho, 1963:95). This occasion is the initial setting standard of dance genres and makes clear the distinction between *Lakhon Nai* and *Lakhon Nok* as the Fine Arts Department provided their definitions of these two dance genres in the program:

The Thai dance drama, when fully developed, has become divided into two kinds of plays, namely, “*Lakhon Nok*”, and “*Lakon Nai*”. *Lakhon Nok* means “the dance drama (of the people) outside (the royal palace)” Formerly only men acted in this kind of drama. *Lakhon*

Nai means “the dance drama (current) inside (the court).” It came into existence later having been adapted by the kings from the *lakhon nok*. Formerly only women in the palace acted in this kind of drama and the performances were given inside the royal palace. It is said that “*Lakhon Nai*” is a contracted form of “*Lakon Nang Nai*” or “*Lakon Nang Nai*”. “*Khang Nai*” just as “*Nai*” means inside and “*Nang*” means woman. Later on men were not restricted to *Lakhon Nok* nor women to *Lakhon Nai*. Again, *Lakhon Nok* and *Lakhon Nai* have borrowed the technical features of each other to some extent, and so they have come to somewhat resemble each other. But the borrowing are only in respect of minor technicalities. In the case of major features, however, each kind of drama keeps its own individuality. Below an attempt is made to distinguish between some of the special features of *Lakhon Nok* and *Lakhon Nai*, as far as can be done in words, in spite of the fact that a clear understanding of the subject can be gained only by actual observation.

(Yupho, *The Khon and Lakhon Dance Dramas*, 1963: 93-94)



Figure 2.3. *Lakhon Nai* dance drama of *Inao: The Episode of Pradanta Decoying Dove*. Image courtesy of the Fine Arts Department



Figure 2.4. Suwanna-Hongse in *Lakhon Nok*: Phram Lek and Phram To abandoning Suwanna-hongse. Image courtesy of the Fine Arts Department

These two productions were not be able to present the original *Lakhon Nai* and *Lakhon Nok* because the presumed ‘essential’ sense of the original aesthetic of court and ordinary taste could not be brought back as a construct. As Rutnin (1993: 81) notes:

After the revolution when the absolute monarchy lost its sanctity and power to the new democratic system, *Lakhon Nai*, was no longer a high and sacred property of the king, or a royal prerogative. It became one of the treasures that belong to the people under the supervision of the Fine Arts Department.

As for *Lakhon Nok*, the Fine Arts Department mainly adapted the dramatic version of King Rama II when *Lakhon Nok* was adapted for performance at court by royal dancers in the eighteenth century; as a result, the production lost much of its original character of popular performance because it was composed and created by the royal dancers who deeply absorbed aristocratic taste. Eoseewong (2005:48-49), the renowned historian in Thai literature, points out that a characteristic of the original *Lakhon Nok* was an emphasis on the improvisation, singing and dancing accompanied with singing without the written scripts. In the version of *Lakhon Nok* produced and supported by the Fine Arts

Department, although the lively spirit and comic scenes characteristic of *Lakhon Nok* were retained and acting style, dancing and singing were elaborated to befit a court version because of the dance master's background. Pramate Boonyachai, a dance scholar, suggests in the seminar at Thammasat University in 2010 that '*Royal Lakhon Nok*' would be a more suitable name for the Fine Arts Department production—rather than *Lakhon Nok* which presents the popular theatre of indigenous people. However, the reinvented *Lakhon Nok* of Fine Arts Department has been performed and taught in the School of Dramatic Arts. This is the reason why contemporary adaptations of *Lakhon Nok* do not carry a sense of popular taste and lack the former's freshness in improvisation and spirited singing between the characters.

After the Fine Arts Department identified traditional dance as a specific genre, the productions in the period after the 1950s tended to invent the dance drama form as relating to the history of the genre of dance. It was evidenced in the programs of the Fine Arts Department during the 1950s and 1960s wherein dance drama began to be standardised through a set of performance elements such as the performance structure, convention and dance techniques. According to *The Khon and Lakhon Dance Drama* written by Dhanit Yupho in which he gathered the programmes of *Khon* and *Lakhon* performed during 1945-1962, Yupho formalised and categorised *Lakhon* dance productions into five specific genres, as mentioned earlier. It is interesting to note that among of these revival productions, some of them were traditionally performed in the past, while some of them were invented to suit the genre. The two productions, which were good examples to demonstrate the invented dance tradition, were *Manohra* invented to present *Lakhon Chatri* in 1954 and *Phya Phanong* to present *Lakhon Phantang* in 1958. These invented dance drama forms were still regularly performed and taught in the present. I will discuss in depth the process of this invention in subsequent section.

It is worth noting that when the Fine Arts Department revived and propagated dance drama as a specific form of dance genre, many journalists and scholars criticised those productions for not precisely presenting the original dance drama. Kukrit Promoj, a royalist and the eminent journalist regularly criticised the productions of the Fine Arts Department in the newspaper *Siamrat* (which he owned) on the pretext that those productions did not present the original genre because it was modernised; he noted that ‘it would better called “dance drama of the Fine Arts Department” or “Dhanit’s Production” instead of identifying as traditional genre’ (*Siamrat*, 18 November 1970⁴⁷). Below is an extract from his criticism of the Fine Arts Department production of *Lakhon Nok, Sang Thong: The episode of the Marriage of the King’s Daughters and the Supply of Fish* performed in February 1954:

The current production of *Lakhon Nok* performed by the Fine Arts Department, when compared to the original ancient dance, is distinctly different; for example, there was a scene change, one-time singing or singing without following music etc. This causes a dancer not to dance at the end of the song. Moreover, there is dance piece which is not *Soi Son Song* or *Sri Nuan*, and some costumes which are very different from ancient *Lakhon Nok*. Actually, *Lakhon Nok* which the Fine Arts Department is performing now uses a lot of material of *Lakhon Panthang*

(The Letter about *Lakhon Nai* and *Lakhon Nok*, *Siamrat* Newspaper, 21 March 1954)

Translated by author

Moreover, M.L. Boonleua Tipsuwan, royalist and daughter of Chao Phraya Thewet Wongwiwat, the chief of the Department of Royal Entertainment in the period of King Rama VI, argued in the seminar on Thai dance and music at Thammasat University in 1972 that the productions of the Fine Arts Department were in fact neo-classical dances

⁴⁷ in the column of Kukrit

which could not fit any categories of ancient dance drama (Tipsuwan, 2009:128). Although there was much criticism about the formalisation of dance drama, the subsequent methods of training and dance text books never appeared to take into account the comments of scholars. The reinvented *Lakhon* has been transmitted from generation to generation and is taught in the dance curricula as a way to preserve tradition; the Fine Arts Department continues to regularly perform and restage these productions in the National Theatre today. This is how the invented dance drama form has been reimagined as contemporary traditional dance in Thailand.

The Transformation of a New Creation to a Tradition: *Manohra* Dance drama

In order to understand how dance drama was invented, I analyse *Manohra* dance drama as an example of the new creation of dance drama in the period of revival 1950s which later became the new traditional dance which is taught and performed even today. *Manohra* was produced as the first production of the Music and Dance Public Organisation and it was performed in 1955. This section examines the people involved in the initial process of creating this dance and its dissemination, and discusses the production of *Manohra* prior to its preservation as *Lakhon Chatri*, the oldest dance genre of Thailand. This production has been repeatedly performed at the National Theatre since that date and some of the scenes have also been taught in the dance curricula ever since. Moreover, some pieces, such as the *Manohra* dance of sacrifice by fire, have been individually and popularly performed on many occasions and passed down from generation to generation. I will trace the paradigmatic moment of the dance's shift from new creation to becoming a symbolic emblem of Thai traditional dance.

Introduction

The first staging of *Manohra* was on 11 February 1955 at Sinlapakorn Theatre. It was performed every weekend throughout 1955, offering seven shows per week. On Friday

and Saturday there were two shows at 2 pm and 8 pm, and Sunday had one extra show at 10 am (So.Tho.0701.39/2⁴⁸). In 1955, *Manohra* was performed around two hundred times and raised revenues of 1,249,859.43 bath (So.tho.0701.39/10:11⁴⁹). Thus, *Manohra* could be considered the most successful production of the Music and Dance Public Organisation.



Figure 2.5 Seven *Kinari* (Bird-woman) bathing in the first scene of *Manohra*.

Photo courtesy of the Fine Arts Department.

Manohra was not only successful with audiences, but particularly with newspaper critics. This production was promoted and recommended by many columnists in various newspapers, such as the *Sri Krung* newspaper⁵⁰ published on 19 February 1955; the *Prachathipatai* newspaper in the column that followed Lakorn performances, published on 21 February 1955; and the *Tredthai* newspaper in a column titled “When I Watch the Organisation’s Dance Drama *Manohra*” published on 20 February 1955. In addition, in the column of *Keplek Phasomnoi* (knitty and gritty), in the *Siamrat*, M.R. Kukrit Promoj,

⁴⁸ So.Tho.0701.39/2 the Minutes of the Committee of the Music and Dance Public Organisation 1/1955 19 March, 1955 (บันทึกการประชุมคณะกรรมการองค์การดุริยางค์นาฏศิลป์ ครั้งที่ 1/2498 19 มีนาคม 2498)

⁴⁹ So.Tho.0701.39/10:11 Income Statement of the Music and Dance Public Organisation 27 November-31 December, 1955 (บัญชีรายรับ รายจ่ายขององค์การดุริยางค์นาฏศิลป์ 27 พย-31 ธ.ค.2498)

⁵⁰ in the column *Phan pai phan ma* (come and go)

a royalist who was a famous journalist and renowned scholar, admired *Manohra* as a good example of a perfect new creation of the Fine Arts Department; for example, the solo dance of *Manohra* sacrificed by fire, and the new song *Krao Klang* accompanying a scene showing a grand military parade. Kukrit also claimed that this was a good way to transform tradition into modernity (Ko.Po7.1955.Vo.Tho.3⁵¹):

The production performing now is *Manohra*. Anyone hearing the name of this drama would be immediately think about the performance from the south of Thailand. That is right because the Fine Arts Department adapted the dance and song of *Nora Chari* for this production [. . .] the information flow, the setting of the scene as well as singing and dancing were newly created by many artists. The dramatic content of each scene is harmoniously narrated through the whole story. It is to be admired that the Fine Arts Department has perfectly produced the new treasure of Thai dance.

(Promoj, Keplek Phasomnoi colume, in the *Siamrat*, 20 February, 1955) translated by author

The purpose in producing *Manohra* was to present *Lakhon Chatri*, or *Lakhon Nora Chatri*, as probably the oldest form of dance drama. It probably originated from the Southern dance drama *Manohra* or *Lakhon Nora*. *Manohra* refers to the Southern dramatic form and is also the name given to a tale taken from the Panansa-Jataka, which is popular in other parts of Southeast Asia, particularly Malaysia (Jungwatanaporn, 2006). *Lakhon Chatri* was propagated in the central Thailand when the artists who performed *Lakhon Chatri* in the south migrated to Bangkok and central Thailand because of poverty and a famine in their home town during the reign of King Rama III (1832) (Rutnin, 1993). From that time, *Lakhon Chatri* dance troupes in central Thailand has regularly performed in the temples or the shrine of God dancers in a ceremony wherein one repays the Gods

⁵¹Ko.Po7.1955.Vo.Tho.3 .News about the Fine Arts Department published in 1955

when one's desire is fulfilled; a ceremony for which dancers are frequently hired by ordinary people (Virulrak, 2004).

On the occasion of the first stage performance of *Manohra*, the Music and Dance Public Organisation was not only producing *Lakhon Nora Chatri*, but also attempting to distinguish the dance drama genres of Thailand by propagating the history of dance drama in the program of *Manohra*. It is important to note that this propagated knowledge has become the standard for categorisation of Thai dance drama and has been passed disseminated until the present. This message of dance history is frequently cited by Thai scholars and is repeated in the current program of *Manohra* of the Fine Arts Department:

There is the evidence proving that the first category, or the Lakon jatri, was performed entirely by men. Its habitat was in the south, especially at Nakon Sri Dharamraj, which was, in olden times, the administrative centre of the peninsula. The plot of the Lakon jatri was based on the folktale of *Manohra*, abbreviated in the regular southern Thai fashion into 'Nora' or often 'Nora Chatri'. But now *Nora Chatri* dance drama has other stories to play.

(The programme of *Manohra*, 1955)

Even though the program of *Manohra* mentions it, as shown below, this *Manohra* production was not the original *Nora Chatri*; it was a combination of Thai theatrical elements which were inspired by *Nora Chatri*. When the dance drama performance was repeated, it was used as a mode to transmit knowledge of the older form to the new generation so the newly-formed *Manohra* production *became* the tradition. The production of *Manohra* is now viewed as the traditional *Lakhon Chatri* because the Fine Arts Department has preserved and continually reproduced *Manohra* at the National Theatre. Moreover, the last scene of production in the hall of the mountain home of the king of the kinnara-folk has been taught and transmitted to the new generation in the

College of Dramatic Arts and in the universities to demonstrate dance movement of the *Chattri* style.

The version of *Manohra* now presented to our audience is a new one, rearranged especially for this performance. In it there have been combined many features of the Thai dance, though some of the original features of the Jatri have been retained to demonstrate the historical development of Thai terpsichorean art. The original Jatri musical instruments have been retained, so also are Jatri recitatives and airs, and many of the original dance motifs and the headdresses. Some of the characters, such as the forester, employ a southern accent of speech in order to remind the audience of the southern origin of the Jatri

One novelty has to be mentioned. The leading roles wear shoes.

(The program of *Manohra*, 1955)

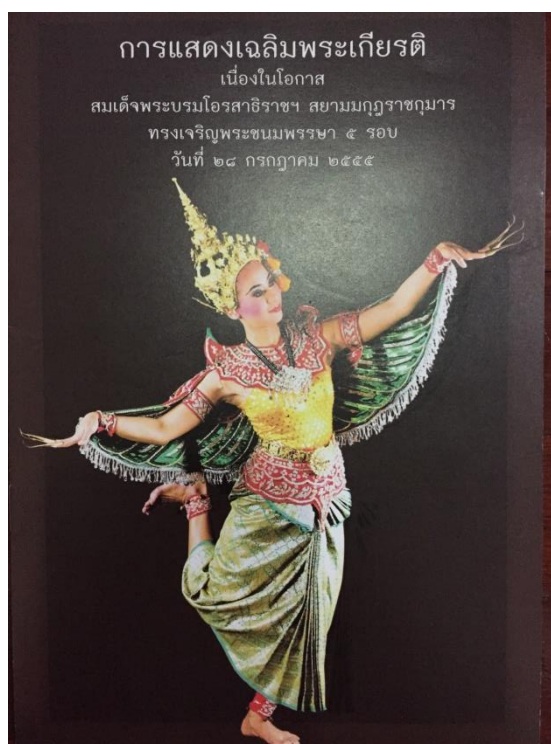


Figure 2.6. The programme of *Manohra* for the first performance and today's programme. Images courtesy of the Fine Arts Department.

Synopsis of the play

Manohra, a magical bird-human, was the youngest daughter of Tumaraj, king of a mythical race of bird-folk living at his capital of Suwannakron. He had 7 daughters and as a pastime, they used to fly through the air to the Lake of Bokkhrani in the thick forest near the hermitage of the old seer Kassop every night of the full moon, and disport themselves in its waters. At a distance from this lake was the state of Pancala, where King Atiyawongs, reigned. His queen was named Canda and his son named Phra Suthon.

One day, Phra Suthon was visited by Phran Boon, a forester. Phran Boon presented him Manohra, a magical bird-human whom Phran Boon caught while hunting in the deep forest. Phra Suthon and Manohra were eventually married and lived a happy life but things changed when a lord of the King's court became jealous of Phra Suthon. He tricked Phra Suthon into leaving the Kingdom and lied to the King that Manohra brought bad luck to the Kingdom. He told the King that the only way to chase away the bad luck was to burn Manohra alive. Manohra survived by asking the King for her wings, so that she could dance in his presence before she died and when she got her wings back, she flew away to Khao Krailas, her home. When Phra Suthon came back to the Kingdom, he was very sad and was determined to bring Manohra back. Phra Suthon journeyed in the forest for seven years, seven months and seven days, faced several challenges before he arrived in Khao Krailas where the last challenge awaited him. Phra Suthon had to identify Manohra from her six sisters, who had been charmed to look exactly like her. Phra Suthon identified the right Manhora when he saw the ring which he had given her. After that, Phra Suthon brought Manohra back to his Kingdom and they lived happily till the end of their days.

Analysis of the *Manohra* production

A key feature of the production is that it was divided into five major scenes which have different composers. Scene one, composed by Montri Tramot, the prominent musician, showed seven *Kinari* (Bird-women) bathing at the Lake of Bokkharani and then the forester Phran Boon catching Manohra and presenting her to Phra Sutton. Scene two, composed by Mom Phaew shows the expression of grief when Phra Sutton had to go to war. A feature of this scene is the war dance in which troops are reviewed by the Prince. Scene three at the Royal plaza Pancala was composed by Luang Ronasithiphichai, the General Director of the Fine Arts Department and also the director of the Music and Dance Public Organisation. The scene shows the raising of a royal pavilion where the King of Pancala is going to carry out a sacrifice in which *Manohra* is the main object. This scene shows the solo sacrificed dance by *Manohra* before she takes to the air and flies away to her abode in the Himalayas.

Scene four, in the forest at the hermitage was composed by Dhanit Youpho, Deputy Director of the Music and Dance Public Organisation, stages Phra Sutton in a search for *Manohra*. He meets the seer who gives him a shawl and a ring from *Manohra* and tells him about the long journey to reach his destination and how to meet *Manohra*. The final scene is in the hall in the mountain home of the King of the kinara-folk, and was composed by Montri Tramot. The King and Queen are overwhelmed with joy to embrace their long-lost daughter *Manohra* as she tells the whole story of her adventure. The main feature of this scene is the dance in which Phra Sutton dances with each of the seven sisters trying to discover the identity of his beloved, and the dance of joy in the mountain home of the Kinara-folk (the Program of *Manohra*, 1955).



Figure 2.7. Comparison of the first production and today's production of scene 1: Pran Boon Catching Manohra. Images courtesy of the Fine Arts Department

It is important to analyse the background of each composer, since it was reflected in each scene of *Manohra*; for example, Scene two was composed by Mom Phaew Sanitwongseni, who used to be a royal dancer and consort of Prince Ausadangdechavut. After the death of the Prince, Mom Phaew remarried M. R. Tun Sanitwong who was an ambassador and followed her husband to live in foreign countries. Her experience of grief in losing her husband and living abroad is reflected in *Manohra* in the expression of this scene when *Manohra* lament of missing her home town and parting from her husband

going to war. Moreover, in Scene four in the forest at the hermitage, composed by Dhanit, who had the experience of being a monk, he typically includes the Balinese language of Buddhism in the dialogue of the seer. However, Scene four was regarded as boring and did not attract a popular audience. Therefore, it is sometimes deleted in subsequent production of the Fine Arts Department (Tantranon, interview, 2014).

Before discussing the combination of *Chattri* and court dance style, I explain the details of conventional *Lakhon Nora Chattri* and its relationship to central Thai dance characteristics. *Lakhon Nora* reflects Southern aesthetic tastes, and its characteristics include dancing with rapid hand and foot movements accompanied by Southern music; and the wearing of long, curved bronzed fingernails and Southern *Soet* head-ornaments. These southern characteristics later inspired royal artists to develop the derivative called *Lakhon Chattri*. *Lakhon Chattri* incorporated popular central dramatic elements and replaced the *Soet* head-ornaments of the South with the *Chada Mongkud* and *Ratklao*. The southern dance style is called *Ram Sat*, and is accompanied by the oboe (*pi*), a pair of drums (*Klong tuk*), a gong (*Mong*), small cymbals (*ching*), a pair of single-faced drums (*thap* or *thon*), and bamboo stick castanets (*krap*). The movements of the body, arms, hands, and legs are sensual, imitating the natural movements of mating birds and animals. Unlike the soft and curving court dance, *Ram Sat* has strenuous and faster movement (Rutin, 1993: 3).

In terms of dance choreography for the *Manohra* production, all dance masters from the Fine Arts Department choreographed different scenes and different main characters. In the style of court dance, Lamoon Yamakup, who was a dance master from the royal household, composed the character of male hero Phra Sutton, and Mom Phaew composed the female heroine Manohra (Tantranon, interview, 2014). For the combined *Lakhon Chattri*, the main choreographer was Munlee Kongraphat, who has her own *Chattri* troupe which performs at Bangkok City Pillar Shrine. She created *Ram Sat*, a *Chattri* dance style,

in the final scene accompanied by the *Chattri* ensemble where Phra Sutton dances with the seven *Kinari* bird-women to discover *Manorah*. The reason why this final scene continues to be taught in the College of Dramatic Arts and at universities is because it absorbs dance movement in the *Chattri* style

The most perfect solo dance piece combining court dance and *Chattri* dance style was the *Manohra* dance of sacrifice by fire, composed by Mom Phaew. This solo dance is in Scene three where Phra Sutton is engaged in the war, and the unscrupulous court advisors conspire to mislead the King into believing that he was in a desperately serious situation. The only way to eradicate the evil spell would be by sacrificing Manohra by fire. Manohra pretends to accept the sacrifice, but offered to delight the King with a farewell dance, with one proviso; that it will not be perfect unless she has back her full dress, complete with the wings and tail which were originally taken from her. Her demand fulfilled, she dances a few rounds, then flies away to her homeland.



Figure 2.8 The *Manohra* solo dance of Sacrifice by Fire performed at the National Theatre on 28 September 2014. Courtesy of the Fine Arts Department.

This solo dance was adapted from *Dorasa Bala*, a sacrifice dance in the *Inao* story of *Lakhon Nai* court dance. The *Manohra* dance integrated the *Dorasa Bala* with more rapid hand and dance movements, and thus strengthened it into *Chattri* style, accompanied by southern music. This solo dance later became more popular and was individually performed on many occasions, such as on the cultural exchange performed in Myanmar in 1955 (interview with Tantranon, the first dancer of *Manohra*, 2014). Afterwards, this *Manohra* solo dance became the traditional dance which has been transmitted to the next generation.

The other newly created elements of *Manohra* which has been reproduced as tradition is the *Kinari* bird-woman costume. This costume was designed by Mot Wongsawat, a national artist, who was a chief designer and art teacher at the Sinlapakon Theatre (Tantranon, interview, 2014). He not only designed the costume, but also many stage techniques for the Fine Arts Department. He gained great success and popularity with his spectacular and elaborate designs during the 30 years between the establishment of the Fine Arts Department in 1933 and 1967 when he retired (Rutin, 1993: 235). The *Kinari* bird-woman costume had been developed over time by adapting embroidery and ornaments from the *Khon-Lakhon* style. *Manohra*'s head-ornament was a combination of the court and *Chattri* head-ornament which were called *Mongkud* and *Soet*. A new way of wrapping cloth, by crossing the fabric around the front to create a fan effect, was designed by dance masters, Khru Munlee, Khru Phun and Khru Lamoon (Tantranon, 2012:73). This way of wrapping has been taught and recorded in dance textbooks and later become a standard style for wearing Thai costume. It is interesting to note that the Fine Arts Department repeatedly used this newly designed costume to present any *Kinari* bird-women in any performance; for example, *Chantakinari*, the story of bird-women composed by Prince Naris. Even though *Chantakinari* was presented as *Lakhon Dukkamban* and not as the *Chattri* style, a similar costume was used for the *Kinari*

characters. It can be said that this costume has now become the standard for *Kinari* bird-women costumes in traditional Thai dance drama.

It is interesting to note that the classical dance dramas which are performed and preserved today were a product of adaptation and modernisation as part of the project of revivalism, despite the fact that the development of dramatic plays before the period of revival was varied and never fixed. In the past, court dance or other private troupes outside the court liberally adapted and modified plays to suit their taste or their audiences. This is the reason why there were various genres of dance drama before preservation. The Fine Arts Department set a new tradition in this adaptation of classical dance by selecting only the parts of literature that were suitable for dramatic performance and new generation audiences. The dance drama plays were made shorter and adapted by condensing and dramatising certain selected parts to suit the practical time limits of performance (the Fine Arts Department, 1951:18). As the purpose was to preserve classical dance, these creative innovations of dance drama, together with adapted play and dance movements, were preserved and were repeatedly taught to new generations as a fixed form. It can be said that after the period of revival classical dance, the dance drama form, traditional method and dramatic texts became restricted to the new form of neo-classical dance and handed down in this form to subsequent generations.

Conclusion

In the revival period of classical dance, Thai dance was dominated by the Fine Arts Department through two institutions: the Office of Performing Arts and the School of Dramatic Art. Through sustained efforts by the Fine Arts Department, court dance has now become a form of classical dance which tends to remain the central aesthetic identification of a constructed 'Thai-ness'. The modernisation of court dance from 1940s to 1960s has become the standard, and is passed on to successive generations in the new

educational system. Although the conventions of classical dance were used to inform the productions, new ideas have also been added to please contemporary audiences. These new invented dances have been handed down to the current generation and have become the new standard, and are preserved as if they were a much older, revered tradition—a practice which continues to the present.

Chapter 3

A Consideration of Spirituality in Classical Dance

As court performance, classical dance especially *Khon* and *Lakhon*, is known as the form of dance drama which maintains a sense of sacredness⁵² (Witayasakpan, 1992: 41; Rutnin, 1983:25). After the revolution in 1932, *Khon* and *Lakhon*, whose origins lie in royal entertainment, became a classical dance that reflected Thai identity. It was continually developed and promoted by the government instead of royal patronage. However, during the first decade of the revolution, *Khon* and *Lakhon* and all of the royal arts were not promoted but were adapted instead as popular entertainment which did not convey a sense of sacredness because of the Cultural Revolution in Phibun period, as I discussed in chapter One. During the 1940s and after World War II, political power in Thailand changed hands and *Khon* and *Lakhon* and other court arts were revived in order to promote and present a strong sense of Thai national identity, as was discussed in Chapter Two. In the late 1950s, the new military government of Sarit rehabilitated the monarchy and restored the old royal traditions and ceremonies in order to promote the dignity of the King. The renewal of the monarchy was also reflected in the revived forms of classical dance, when the King's involvement in the *Wai Khru* ceremony in the early 1960s bestowed a sense of legitimacy over the dance forms.

This chapter explores complex ways in which classical dance was brought back to cultural prominence and managed to revive the aforementioned sense of sacredness. I will explore the way in which the state chose to raise the idea of the spiritual in classical Thai Dance that linked to the rebirth of the King's status, and how this spiritual aspect was propagated and transmitted to new generations. In order to engage with these questions, I will analyse

⁵² Rutnin (1983:25) pointed out that *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance drama respected as sacred because the stories in *Khon* and *Lakhon* were usually taken from the religious myths or Jataka tales, which was about the previous lives of Buddha, which associated with Thai Kingship.

the processes involved in the reconstruction of the ritual of the *Wai Khru* ceremony, and the invention of royal involvement in the passing of the tradition of the most sacred dance, *Ong Phra Phirap*.

During the period in which classical dance was revived in the 1940s, the Fine Arts Department not only reconstructed traditional dance drama productions but also revived the Thai custom and rite of the *Wai Khru*, or ‘paying homage to teachers’. In Thai society, the teacher or ‘*Khru*’ is given great respect and status. Teachers were regarded as being more important than merely people who taught; they were also viewed as second parents and leaders of society. There are various kinds of *Wai Khru* ceremonies in Thai society, and the one that almost all Thai children experience is the annual rite of paying homage to the teacher of general education, which generally takes place during the first semester in school and university. The practice of demonstrating profound reverence for a teacher through ritual remains dominant today, especially in arts and culture studies such as Thai Boxing, Thai massage as well as in Thai dance and music. This ceremony is viewed as being very important for dance students and they are required to participate in it at least three times in their student life: before starting to learn dance, before learning the high level of *Naphat* dance repertoire, and before receiving the right to be a dance master. The *Wai Khru* ceremony is performed once a year by the Fine Arts Department, the College of Dramatic Arts and all dance institutions all over Thailand.

There are many books published about the *Wai Khru* ceremony in Thai dance (Yupho, 1961; Tapewong, 2005), but very few deeply research the ritual itself (Boonyachai, 1997). Most books are descriptive and attend to details of the ceremony, particularly the process of the *Wai Khru* ritual, the musical repertoires for the *Wai Khru* ritual, or food offering on the altar. Several books dealing with arts *Wai Khru* ceremonies refer to the booklet published by the Fine Arts Department in 1961 or draw on the author’s observation of the *Wai Khru* ceremony. Two examples in particular have proven to be significant for my

research. Firstly, a Master thesis written by Pramate Boonyachai, renowned dance scholar and artist, entitled *the Master of Ceremony's Dances in the Rite of Paying Homage to the Teachers of Khon and Lakhon* (1997), which is one of the most referenced sources of the *Wai Khru*. His research centres on the seven dance pieces of the master ceremony performed during the ritual, and the history of the royal line of dance master of the *Wai Khru* ceremony. Boonyachai's thesis is valuable in a number of different ways. His study presents idealised descriptions of the *Wai Khru* dance. This is a conscious effort to describe and analyse the ritual by pinning down its many particularities and comparing the procedures of *Wai Khru* presided over by different masters from 1971 to 1997. His thesis offers a lucid understanding of the history of *Wai Khru* ceremony and the lineage of masters in the royal line. Although Boonyachai traces the history of *Wai Khru* and the changes to its procedure, he does not investigate the socio-political contexts which affected the *Wai Khru* ceremony, the state authority and the King's intervention, which I will discuss in this chapter. Secondly, the other useful source was a recently published book entitled *the Wai Khru Ritual for Thai Performing Arts* written by Sumit Tapewong (2005), a Thai dance scholar teaching at Phranakhon Si Aytthaya Rajabhat University. This booklet outlines basic Thai and Hindu beliefs, and the process of *Wai Khru* more generally, along with the musical repertoires and the details of the oblation food offering on the altar.

However, the most influential source is by Deborah Wong entitled *Sounding the Center History and Aesthetic in Thai Buddhist Performance* (2001). Her perspectives, which may have developed from her position as an outsider who isn't of Thai heritage, differ in several interesting ways from work done by Thai scholars on the subject. Wong (2001, xvvi) analyses *Wai Khru* ceremony as a performance and her study focuses on 'the connections between kings, teachers, knowledge, and performance form a network of power exchange and renewal that continues to impel the classical court arts.' Her thesis

broadly supports my argument about the influence of the state in building the spiritual aspect of classical dance. The main focus of her research is also the *Wai Khru* music ceremony and the transmission of the music where there are different procedures to those around the construction of legitimacy for dance knowledge. I agree with Wong's perspective that:

The *Wai Khru* is "about" the state, but it is focused on the monarchy, whereas the Thai nation-state is now that and more. The extent to which the *Wai Khru* can encompass modernity's redefinition of that state remains to be seen. (Wong, 2001:250)

However, I will draw upon the gap in her discussion of state power to illustrate how the *Wai Khru* was propagated in Thai society and how the state authority in Thai classical dance is constructed and maintained. I will focus especially on the most sacred dance piece in the *Wai Khru* ritual, called *Ong Phra Phirap*, which Wong did not tackle in her thesis.

This chapter investigates *Wai Khru* as a state instrument to regulate and standardise classical Thai dance. Established by the Fine Arts Department in 1945, this ceremony renders a sense of the sacredness to the dance teachers or those who invented traditional dances in Thai culture. It holds multi-faceted meanings in Thai dance circles, ensuring the notion that any performances following the ceremony should be considered aesthetically authentic and culturally valuable in the Thai context. The research traces the early 1940s when the *Wai Khru* ceremony was resurrected by the Fine Arts Department and developments in 1961. Under the circumstance that the state took control of arts forms and expression, the revival of the *Wai Khru* ceremony not only demonstrates the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students, but also expresses Thai beliefs in supernatural powers. The chapter examines the process by which the state used this ritual dance to disseminate knowledge about the ceremony and spiritual meanings to Thai

society. To understand the construction of dance knowledge, the notion of episteme and discursive formation has been borrowed to investigate the interconnections between the state control, monarchy and the dancer's belief in the contemporary *Wai Khru* ceremony.

This chapter comprises three main sections. Firstly, in order to describe the process of *Wai Khru*, I will start with my ethnographic fieldwork of annual *Wai Khru* ceremony held on 12 June 2014 at the National Theatre. This section aims to clarify the spiritual contexts and beliefs surrounding the ritual of *Wai Khru* and how it operates and is embodied by dancers today. Secondly, I will trace the historical documents of *Wai Khru* from the royal text in the reign of King Rama IV 1854 and Rama VI, 1914 and trace the evolution of the *Wai Khru* ceremony after the Fine Arts Department revived the ceremony in 1945 as part of its cultural revivalism. The emphasis is on how the state reconstructed the ceremony of *Wai Khru* and how they officiate the practice of sacredness as device of cultural revivalism. Drawing upon critical readings in publications, I will argue that the ceremony operates as the state propaganda for constructing belief in Thai dancers.

Finally, the research analyses the authority of the state in regulating Thai classical dance especially when they attempted to establish dance as a 'version'. The focus on the invention of passing on the *Ong Phra Phirap* dance, regarded as the most significant classical dance in the *Wai Khru* ceremony, can lead to an argument that the royal and the state power have cohesively manipulated tradition in classical Thai dance. I argue that the royal patronage also set new standards for traditional dance with the King's involvement in 1961. The details of this royal intervention will be analysed in this section. To support my claim, the research demonstrates two versions of *Ong Phra Phirap* dances: the royal version and unofficial version, especially discussing the impact of state intervention in passing on the *Ong Phra Phirap* dance.

Wai Khru Ceremony as Performance

The *Wai Khru* ceremony is the custom and rite of paying homage through which Thai traditional dancers demonstrate profound reverence for their teacher. Traditionally, there were two levels of *Wai Khru* ceremony, the first level was called *Khumnab Khru* for new students before starting to learn to dance, and the second level was called *Khrob Khru* for students who acquired a standard of dance skill and were considered competent to perform on the stage (Yupho, 1961:4). The ritual of *Wai Khru* is comprised of several levels of religious complexity that reveals strong influences of Brahmanism, Hinduism and indigenous Animism. All these beliefs existed in Thai society before Thais began to regard themselves as Buddhist (Sinthuphan, 2007: 186, Boonyachai, 1997). The elements of three belief systems are all reflected in the procedures of *Wai Khru* ceremony, in its purpose, functionaries and ritual process. At the beginning of the ceremony, an invocation rite is performed for the dancers and musicians to worship three jewels - Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, which reflect Buddhist beliefs. At the same time, the ceremony is devised to open up the channel between the world of humans and that of the teacher to obtain the spiritual validation of the gods, based on Hinduism and supernatural beings in the universe, and spirits of teachers who preside over the ceremony as a reflection of Brahmanism.

In order to understand the spirituality and beliefs in the ritual of *Wai Khru*, it is important to explain the procedure of the *Wai Khru* ceremony. Boonyachai (1997) divides the *Wai Khru* ritual into three main parts: the rite of Buddhists, the rite of paying homage to teacher and the rite of authorising the dancer to perform and to teach. To analyse the details of these procedures, I will explain by using my own experience as a participant in the *Wai Khru* ceremony as a student at the Dramatic Arts College and a teacher at the Drama Department, Thammasat University, and through the field work conducted for this thesis to observe various *Wai Khru* ceremony in Thailand in 2014 and 2016. The *Wai*

Khru is flexible and can be adapted to the place and participants where it is being performed. As Wong said ‘no two *Wai Khru* rituals are ever performed in exactly the same way even by the same teacher’ (2001:16). The master can establish his own way of leading and improvising the details of the ritual as long as it follows three basic structures: inviting the gods to the altar, offering food to the gods, and empowering and initiating participants. The ceremony which I will focus on in this thesis is the *Wai Khru* from my observation and participation in annual *Wai Khru* arranged by the Fine Arts Department held on 12 June 2014 at the National Theatre. This event was mainly arranged for the official dancers who work in the Office of Performing Arts; however, it was also opened to the public⁵³. The details of each procedure are as follows.

The first part was the rite of Buddhist ceremony, the purpose of which is to make a merit for senior dance teachers who are no more (Teapwong, 2005:32). The ritual began in the morning at 7 a.m. and continued to 9 a.m. At the National Theatre, nine Buddhist monks chanted for about an hour to pay tribute to dance teachers who are long gone and then the participants offered food to the monks as alms. It is customary in Buddhism to view monks and this aspect of the ceremony as aimed at honouring the departed, but also wishing a peaceful afterlife for them. Normally, this ritual is separated from the main ritual of *Wai Khru* ceremony; it is sometimes arranged in another room, depending on the venue.

After finishing the Buddhist ceremony at 9 a.m., the *Wai Khru* ceremony was led by the master who transformed into a Brahmin, dressed in all-white garments. In this event, the master of the ceremony was Sombati Kaewsujarit, who directly received the right to be a master of *Wai Khru* from the King in 1984. Kaewsujarit began the ceremony by calling

⁵³ The other participants who want to attend this ceremony need to book for a seat in advance from the Fine Arts Department before attending the ceremony, interviewed Julsub Doungpattr, the junior dancer from the Fine Arts Department, 8 December 2015

out to the musical ensemble to play the *Brahm Khao Naphat* piece and then he danced into the altar along a long length of white cloth, holding the conch shell with holy water. When the ensemble had almost finished playing, he turned around and scattered water from the conch shell above the participants; they saluted as the holy water touched them. The general-director of the Fine Arts Department who presided over the ceremony had lit the candle on the altar, and Kaewsujarit began reciting incantations in order to honour the Khru Gods. After that, Kaewsujarit read the text and asked the participants to repeat the text after him, phrase by phrase, to invite the Khru Gods, Khru hermits, and Khru spirits in turn to the ceremonial space. After finishing each chant of inviting God, Kaewsujarit asked for a special musical sequence called *Naphat* from the *Piphat* ensemble as a symbol of invitation to Khru Gods and spirits to the ceremony.

Each *Naphat* represents particular Gods and functions; for example, *Sathukarn* is used for worshipping the Triple Gem, paying homage to teachers and recalling to mind their virtues, *Choen* used for inviting the god Siva, and *Sangwoei Senlao* refers to the time the spirits of teachers feast on the food offering (Yupho, 1990:4). According to an interview I conducted with Sombati Kaewsujarit, the master can establish his own way of asking for *Naphat* which depends on the numbers of participants and amount of time available for the ceremony. It is usual to ask for about thirty to forty *Naphat* pieces in each particular ritual (Boonyachai, 1997). After inviting all the Khru Gods into the ritual, Kaewsujarit called for *Naphat Long Song* (presiding teacher bathing) and invited senior dancers to pour water over the small Shiva image and Khanet image. After that, he called out for the *Naphat Choed Twai Khruang* piece, and led the group of participants in presenting and offering the oblation to the Khru Gods by performing a dance while holding the oblations. After that the musical ensemble played *Naphat Senlao* for the duration the spirits of Khru Gods were believed to be feasting on the food offering. This aspect of the ceremony took

about two hours—from 9 a.m. to about 11 a.m.—in light of the belief that it must be finished before noon (Yupho, 1990:16).



Figure 3.1. The annual *Wai Khru* ceremony at the National Theatre 12 June 2014. Clockwise from left- The altar of the *Wai Khru*, dancing into the altar, offering food to the spiriual teacher, and reciting incanation. Photographs by the researcher.

When the rite of paying homage to teacher ended, assistants cleared the altar to prepare the objects which are used for the initiation ritual, such as the mask of *Por Kae*, the mask of *Phra Phirap*, a *Soet* (a dance head dress). One by one, those objects were removed from the altar and handed to Kaewsujarit. He quickly donned them and recited an incantation into their interiors, activating their spirits. Kaewsujarit put the mask of *Por*

*Kae*⁵⁴ or the Old Father on his head, requested the musical ensemble to play the piece *Naphat Smoe Thean* while he danced with the staff on the long length of white cloth, making it a path to the ritual space. This process was meant to invite *Por Kae*, the first teacher of performing arts, to empower his body and enable him to preside over the ritual, and begin the initiation rite.



Figure 3.2. Left: reciting an incantation into the mask. Right: inviting *Por Kae* empowered into his body. Photographs by the researcher.

In the process of initiation or being ‘covered’, the group of participants, about nine to ten people, came to the ritual space sitting in front of Kaewsujarit and offered him the bowl containing flowers, incense, and candles. Kaewsujarit covered their head one by one with three masks: *Por Kae*, *Phra Phirap* and the *Soet* headdress, and sprinkled each person with holy water. He then dipped his finger in the powder mixture, drew an auspicious dot on each person’s forehead and uttered an incantation. During the initiation ritual, the senior teachers lead the pupils in a ritual dance called *Ram Tawai Mu* (a dance to offer

⁵⁴ ‘*Por kae*’ or the old father, is the hermit who is known by the name of Pra Prot-rishi, the name that is thought to be the Thai version of the Indian Bharatamuni. In Thai performer belief, he was the one who witnessed Shiva’s cosmic dance and wrote down all of Shiva dance and compiled it to the Indian performance theory of *Natyadastra*. (Sithuphan, 2007: 190-191). Thais believe he is the original teacher and the elemental source of the knowledge of performance.

the hands of the dancers to the gods). *Ram Tawai Mu* was started by the women pupils, and has four components: the *Naphat Cha Reo*; the *Naphat Bathsakunee*; the *Kukphat*; and the *Samoe Kham Samut*, which correspond respectively to four distinct characters. The women portray characters of human heroes as well as heroines during the *Naphat Cha Reo* and those playing the roles of heroes dance the *Naphat Bathsakunee*, while those trained as demons danced to *Kukphat*, and finally, the actors embodying the character of the monkey figure dance to *Samoe Kham Samut*. However, these *Ram Tawai Mu* dances are flexible wherein the pupils can decide the order of performance of the four elements of the dance. This process of the initiation rite might take up to a whole day depending on the number of participants.

When the rite was over, Kaewsujarit delivered a speech masquerading as the Old Father and then blessed the participants. Then he called for *Naphat Smoe Samla* and danced on the long white cloth. He took the mask of *Por Kae* off his head and danced to *Naphat Phram Ook*, which was symbol of the Old Father emerging out of his body. Finally, Kaewsujarit leads the pupils to dance to *Naphat Proi Khaotok*, holding the scattered popped rice, as a symbol of good wishes for success, and then followed on to *Naphat Kraoram*. This final process is called *Song Khru*, to invite all Khru Gods or spirits to return to their abodes, thus bringing the ritual to an end.



Figure 3.3. The process of initiation or being ‘covered’, and in the background, the participants dancing the *Ram Tawai Mu*. Photograph by the researcher.

***Wai Khru* and Cultural Change**

Wai Khru, as with all traditions, was undeniably affected by cultural change. After the revolution of 1932, royal *Wai Khru*, like other court arts, was arranged by the state. As Daboo (2010:201) suggests ‘the notion of ‘tradition’ is not fixed, but in constant change in relation to shifts in the socio-cultural surroundings and developments with multiplicities of manifestations and approaches’. However, in the mid-1940s, after the establishment of the project of traditional revival, the Fine Arts Department attempted to preserve and standardise all kinds of classical arts including *Wai Khru* ceremony. This idea of fixing the traditional as an object is what Handler calls ‘cultural objectification’. Handler (1988:14), adapted the idea from Bernard Cohn that ‘have made (their culture) into a “thing” and can stand back and look at themselves, their ideas, their symbols and culture and see it as an entity’. Handler also critiques Cohn, because Cohn is suggesting

the tradition is consciously objectified and knowingly used, and Handler thinks that in this rediscovery of tradition, the discoverers are blinded to the hidden logic guiding their discoveries. The idea of the cultural as a thing was gradually embodied in *Wai Khru* when it was used to express national identity. In this section, I will trace the evolution of *Wai Khru* ceremony in terms of the way its function was regarded by the state, and the way in which its value to state power was consequently imagined in the *Wai Khru* ceremony.

Historical Record in Royal *Wai Khru* Ceremony

Historically, we cannot identify when the first *Wai Khru* occurred in Thai society. Boonyachai (1997:479) presumed that the *Wai Khru* probably existed from the late Ayutthaya period in which the *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance dramas originated. However, there were only two pieces of historical evidence recorded in writing about the Royal *Wai Khru* ceremony: in the reign of King Rama IV, 1854 and in the reign of King Rama VI, 1914. The oldest evidence is the record of the Royal *Wai Khru* ceremony held in 1854 arranged by King Rama IV, for his new royal dance troupe. This *Wai Khru* ceremony was presided over by Khru Ked Phra Ram who was an attendant of royalty (the Fine Arts Department, 1960: 4). King Rama IV had the invocation text of the *Wai Khru* edited and established as the royal text of *Wai Khru* for *Khon* and *Lakhon* ritual, and it was later published by the Fine Arts Department in 1951 (the Fine Arts Department, 1960). According to the Fine Arts Department (1960:79), this text of *Wai Khru* was not written by the King himself but was probably written together by dance teachers and submitted to the King for his approval. Rutnin (1993:89), a renowned scholar of Thai theatre, translates a description of the royal command for the event in her study as follows:

Phraya Kamroephak has received the royal command that the Maom Lakhon (King's consorts who were Lakhon dancers) in the Royal palace will come out to perform the

Ceremony of *Khrob Wai Khru Lakhon* (Initiation of dancers and invocation to the dance teachers of Lakhon) at the raised platform of the Dusit Mahapasat Hall, and that seven monks will chant the Buddhist prayers at the Thim Dap Khot site in the palace on Wednesday, the 14th day of the waning moon, the fifth month, in the afternoon. On the next day, Thursday, the first day of the rising moon, sixth month, in the morning, after the monks have taken their meal, the dance teachers will initiate the Mom Lakhon (sic).

I translate the initiation ritual as follows:

Put the mask of Rishi on the master's head, and then take it off. Recited the incantation of *Mongkutjao* and *Khrobjakgrawannoi* and then put the *Rishi* over the pupil's head, then take it back to the master's head. Then put over the pupil's head the sacred masks and head-dresses: those of *Soet* head-dress, the mask of *Phra Ram*, *Phra Lak*, *Phra Prut*, *Phra Sattarut*, *Todsakan*, *Phra Phirap*, *Mongkut* head-dress, *Ratklao* and *Chada*

(The Royal Text of *Wai Khru* for *Khon Lakhon* Ritual, 1854) translated by author

It is evident now that the *Wai Khru* is a process that has developed over time. From a comparison of the Royal Text of *Wai Khru* in 1854 and the contemporary *Wai Khru* ceremony, the basic structures of *Wai Khru* today continue to be identical to the manner in which it was performed in 1854. *Wai Khru* continues to be performed on Thursday because according to Thai beliefs, it is an auspicious day observed for teachers (the Fine Arts Department, 1960: 8) and the ceremony continues to begin with the Buddhist ceremony and is followed by the initiation ritual. However, the details of each process of *Wai Khru* and the initiation ritual were far more complex than those performed today, particularly in the number of procedures and incantations. For instance, in the reign of King Rama VI, around eleven sacred masks and head-dresses were used in the initiation ritual, while only three masks are used today, as is shown in the document.

The other historical record of *Wai Khru* is the royal command in the reign of King Rama VI (King Vajiravudh). This Royal *Wai Khru* held on Wednesday and Thursday, 13-14 May 1914 at the Theatre of Chitralada Villa Royal Residence (Ibid, 1960:34). In records of this *Wai Khru* event, there was an extraordinary ritual called *Phiti Yuanyatra* (Ibid, 1960:44). In this ritual, Luang Youngyingkhru, the leading dancer in the royal household, was sacrificed because of committing an offence. The King pretended to cut off the head of Luang Youngyingkhru, and then the master of *Wai Khru* pleaded for the dancer's life (Ramnat 2003: 97-105). This particular ritual vividly demonstrated the power of the teacher which enabled him to secure the pupil's life. However, this ritual is not performed in *Wai Khru* ceremonies today. I will now discuss in depth the fate of this ritual when the government attempted to restore it in 1961.

***Wai Khru* after the Revolution in 1932**

The official *Wai Khru* ceremony was not arranged when the royal household department was transferred to the Fine Arts Department in 1935 (the cremation volume of Luang Vilard Wongngam, 1964:21). Between 1934 and 1944, from the establishment of the National School of Dramatic Arts, the official *Wai Khru* ceremony was not conducted; there was an informal performance of *Wai Khru* for the initiation of new students, known as *Khumnab Khru*, presided over by Khun Ying Nathakanurak, Dance Master, performed at the School of Dramatic Arts (Boonyachai, 1997:67). Traditionally, the *Khumnab Khru* ritual needed to be performed before the students could begin their dance study. The new student would simply bring flowers or a garland, incense and a candle—symbols that made an appearance in the ethnography discussed earlier—to the first lesson and take part in the rite before receiving instructions.

The reason why the official *Wai Khru* was not arranged by the Fine Arts Department during this time was, I argue, the Cultural Revolution during the Phibun period. As I

discussed in Chapter One, after the revolution of 1932, the new government attempted to persuade Thai people towards a modernisation of the Thai nation. Many announcements were made that intended to change the Thai people's behaviour and belief towards a new culture. One announcement issued on 5 May 1943 focused on the need for a rejection of superstition⁵⁵ (Witayasakpan, 1992:125), this set out to persuade people to not believe in superstition and have self-confidence because superstitious fears were contrary to the national religion, Buddhism, and to the national culture. Buddhism, as per the announcement, advocated that people have to take responsibilities for their own life rather than aspire for a result from praying for miracles. As the whole procedure of *Wai Khru* ceremony comprises elements of the supernatural, of Gods and deceased and divine teachers, this invocation against superstition may have led the Fine Arts Department to suspend performances of the *Wai Khru* for a decade. Moreover, the other reason for the abandonment of the *Wai Khru* ceremony was that *Khon* and *Lakhon* was rarely performed on the stage of the Fine Arts Department. Therefore, it was not necessary to arrange *Khrob Khru*, the second step of *Wai Khru* which was for the initiation of novice students preparing to perform in the *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance dramas.

The Reconstruction of *Wai Khru*: Change and the New Tradition

It is clear from the above historical evidence that *Wai Khru* ceremony was not invented tradition but an effect of cultural change. As Wong's analysis of the *Wai Khru* ceremony argues using Eric Hobsbawn's idea of the invention of tradition (Wong, 2001: 250), 'Hobsbawm regards the reconfiguration of old and new "materials" as invention, but this in itself is not remarkable, nor does it locate the *Wai Khru* as invented'. In fact, *Wai Khru*

⁵⁵ Witayasakpan, (1992:125) cited from Prakat Sapha Watthanatham Haeng Chat Ruang Chakchan hai loek neyom saiyasat (announcement of the National Institute of Culture on rejection superstition), issued on May5, 1943," in Thamrongsak, Pramuan: 138-39)

has morphed over time in court performances because of the impact of cultural change. From this point, I will highlight in this section the way in which the government reconstructed the *Wai Khru* ceremony and changed the ritual's meaning. I argue that *Wai Khru* performed today was formalised and standardised after the period of revivalism in the 1940s. These new standardised procedures would then continue to be preserved as a new tradition and gradually absorbed by the future generations across Thai society.

In the 1940s, when the government undertook the project of cultural revivalism, *Khon* and *Lakhon* were revived for performance on the stage of the Fine Arts Department. The School of Dance and Music was reformed with the aim to preserve traditional court dance drama; *Khon* and *Lakhon* were officially contained in the dance curriculum. As a part of the project of cultural revivalism, the Fine Arts Department arranged the first official *Wai Khru* ceremony on 15 November 1945 (the cremation volume of Luang Vilard Wongngam, 1964:23). Dhanit Yupho, Head of the Office of Performing Arts at that time explained the proposed arrangement of the *Wai Khru* in the cremation volumes of Luang Vilard Wongngam (1964:22), who was chosen to be a master of *Wai Khru*, which I translate as follows:

Another essential task is to revive the *Wai Khru* ceremony, which was abandoned for many years after Phraya Natthakanurak passed away in 1935. Since then, there was no one to preside over the ceremony. When the Fine Arts Department revived and developed the traditional performing arts after World War II, I consulted with *Khon-Lakhon* dance masters and they all agreed that it was necessary to revive the *Wai Khru* and *Khrob Khru* ceremonies because traditionally some traditional dance pieces were able to be taught only after the student had passed the process of *Khrob Khru*. Thus, after meeting with the dance masters, a majority of them approved Luang Vilard Wongngam, *Khon* senior teacher, as the master of *Wai Khru* ceremony [. . .] Luang Vilard Wongngam first presided over the *Wai Khru* and *Khrob Khru* ceremony on 15 November 1945 at the Silapakon Theatre.

Translated by author



Figure 3.4. The revival of *Wai Khru* ceremony presiding by Luang Vilard Wongngam. Photo courtesy of Thai National Archive (PJ.ST.0701/186)

***Wai Khru* and Dance Pedagogy**

Since *Wai Khru* was reconstructed by the Fine Arts Department, the ritual gradually changed its position and purpose from being conducted only for private dance troupes intending to perform within an educational institute. In an interview Sombati Kaewsujarit (interviewed, 2015), the senior *Wai Khru* master explained to me that performing the *Wai Khru* today was different from performances of it in the past because it has changed from a royal dance troupe to a ceremony within the educational system. The ritual procedures need to be adapted to suit the increasing number of the students. As a result, in terms of the education system, the level of *Wai Khru* has become formalised and standardised to include more levels than in the past, and relate directly to university dance curricula. Prior to the introduction of *Wai Khru* into the Fine Arts Department in 1934, there were only two levels of *Wai Khru*; one was for new students called *Khumnab Khru*, and the next

step called *Khrob Khru* was for skillful students to have a right to learn the *Naphat* dance. From the change in the cultural and political environment, the Thai dancer's respect for knowledge has been enhanced by adding three more levels to the necessary display of knowledge for *Wai Khru* performances today. The additional steps demonstrate a dancer's right to be a dance master; the right to perform the most sacred *Ong Phra Phirap* dance piece; and the right to be a master of *Wai Khru*. This new procedure and the new standard levels that were introduced in the 1940s have been preserved until the present day, and the details of each level are as follows.

The first level called *Khumnab Khru* is the initiation for new students before they start to learn dance. Normally, it is arranged on a Thursday in the first two weeks of the new semester (Pengsuk, interview, 2014). In this ceremony, the teacher selects the new students on the basis of appearance in order to suit the four different characters of *Khon-Lakhon*; male, female, demon and monkey. However, currently in the private dance schools, the students can choose by themselves what character they want to learn; it is only in the College of Dramatic Arts that this tradition is still preserved. In this ceremony, the senior teacher, who can be male or female, presides over the ritual and leads the students to take flowers, incense, and a candle to the teacher. The teacher grasps the student's hands to dance in the first posture, which is the salutation posture, and chants '*Ohm Phra Visanukram Thawa Prasit*', which means 'May God Virahnu grant you academic success' (Boonyachai, 1997:116)



Figure 3.5. The ritual of *Khumnab Khru*, the initiation for new students at the Dramatic Arts College on 31 March 2016. Left: Image courtesy of Supphamongkol Vangnaitham. Right: Photograph by the researcher.

The second level of *Wai Khru*—*Khrob Khru*—is a process of having the head “covered” as a confirmation of the aptitude and ability of the trained performers. This process is the appointment of a teacher for dancers to learn the higher level of *Naphat*, when the student has acquired the necessary standard of skill and is considered ready to perform on stage. *Naphat* dances are dance pieces for *Khon* and *Lakhon* that depict verbal or physical movement in particular actions. Traditionally, according to Yupho (1990:6), and his interview with senior dance teachers, dance students are granted initiation only after they have mastered slow-tempo and fast-tempo dances and are considered competent to perform on the stage. In this ritual, the master of *Wai Khru* holds the masks of the Old Father (hermit), *Phra Phirap* mask and the *Soet* headdress over each student.

It is interesting that today the concept of *Khrob Khru* has changed substantially, and this process of being “covered” has spread across Thailand, not only in the realm of

traditional dance, but in all performing arts. The changes in the ritual impacted the performer's belief system. Movie stars and all kinds of performers regularly participate in the annual *Wai Khru* ceremony and are “covered”; it is not considered particularly auspicious for their dance training but for success in their career path of performance.



Figure 3.6. The ritual of *Khrob Khru* or being ‘covered’.

Photograph by the researcher.

The third level of *Wai Khru* involves receiving confirmation of becoming a teacher and for the promotion of accomplished performers to the status of masters, a role called *Rab Mop*. This process marks the transition for graduates before they start their role as dance teachers. It is interesting to note that there is no documentary evidence to support the fact that the *Rab Mop* ritual had been conducted before in any royal dance troupe. In fact, it seems only to have been recorded as occurring and having been established after court dance had transferred into an educational system. Traditionally, royal dancers who had high levels of skill and dance experience would become masters when they were mature enough to teach. In the context of the educational system, however, the main purpose of

the dance curriculum was to enable a student to be an effective dance teacher, and the *Rab Mop* ritual was conducted as if it were a certificate to guarantee that senior dancers are skillful enough to teach their own students.



Figure 3.7. The ritual of *Rab Mop*, received for being a dance teacher.

Photo courtesy of Bunditpatanasilpa Institute.

The other two levels of *Wai Khru* are unusual rituals which are directly related to the power of state and royal patronage. The fourth level is receiving a right to dance *Ong Phra Phirap*, the highest dance piece of the *Naphat* repertoire and the fifth level is to receive a right to be a *Wai Khru* master, and the appointment of a senior teacher to act as master in the *Wai Khru* ceremony. These two levels require special qualifications which were restricted by the Fine Arts Department. I argue that these two rituals and their criteria were only established as customs in the early of 1960s after the rehabilitation of the monarchy.

Royal and Power of Returning the Spirituality in *Wai Khru* and Classical Dance

The beginning of the King's involvement in *Wai Khru* ceremonies can be traced to the early 1960s. Before analysing the power of the King's intervention in Thai dance, it is

necessary to discuss the social-political context of the monarch's status in Thailand. For over two decades after the revolution of 1932, during the Phibun period the institution of the monarch had declined and the King only performed his role symbolically. In the late 1950s, the rehabilitation of the king was greatly resurrected in the Sarit government (Connors, 2005: 529) in order to create a sense of national unity (Rutnin, 1993:193). Sattayanurak (2013:118-119), a renowned historian, notes that in order to resist a rising communist ideology, Sarit's government attempted to revive the spirit of monarchy. Sarit restored many 'traditional' royal rites and ceremonies, such as the Royal Barge Procession and the Royal Ploughing Ceremony, in order to provide the King with opportunities to be seen in the monarch's public role (Jungwiwattanaporn, 2012:63; Rutnin, 1993:193).

Moreover, in the announcement of the Office of the Prime Minister, issued on 21 May 1960, the national day was changed from 24 June, the revolution day, to 5 December (*Ratchakitjanubaksa* (the government gazette), 1960: 1452). In addition to the support of the government, the publications of the elites and intellectuals also played an important role in elevating the monarch's status. For example, Krommuen Pittayalabpritiyakhorn, a nobleman, wrote about the institution of royalty and the coronation which presented the importance and holiness of the King. His book was highly referenced and respected by Thai scholars and people and has become an important tool to elevate the King's position to be the foremost symbol of the Thai nation (Sattayanurak, 2013:119). However, besides government support, the King Bhumibol Adulyadej himself also worked hard and dedicated his life to initiating many royal development projects to improve the living conditions of Thai citizens for about seven decades of his reign. As a result, the monarchy's status was successfully revived and the King has gradually become the most worshipped figure, capturing the heart and soul of Thailand and regarded as the father of the nation.

It is interesting to note that almost twenty years after the revival of *Wai Khru* ceremonies in 1940s, the *Wai Khru* remained restricted to dance institutions, which represents the actual relationship between teacher and student. However in 1961, during the rehabilitation of the monarch, the monarch started to get involved in the ceremony when King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the present King, played a significant role in support of Thai classical dance. It can be said that royal patronage has enriched and reshaped the power of the *Wai Khru* ceremony into a more official and sacred one. In a move to preserve and support Thai traditional performance, the King personally subsidised the Fine Arts Department with about 10,000 Thai baht to operate three main projects. The first was to publicise Thai songs with their synopses and publish 1,000 books every six months. The second was to gather ancient Thai songs for later publishing and the third was to record and publicise *Naphat* dance repertoires, the sacred dance (So.Tho.0701.40/81:3⁵⁶).

From His Majesty's subsidisation, Thai dance and *Wai Khru* began to be associated with royal patronage again, as it used to be. As a part of his project, the special *Wai Khru* was arranged on 5 October 1961 for dancers and dance students from the School of Dramatic Arts who would perform Thai classical dance for His Majesty's personal film production, and students from Chitralada School, a royal school, who would perform a *Manohra* production for the Red Cross Fair (Ibid:95). At this special event, there were not only performances of the *Wai Khru* with teachers and students, but with many aristocrats involved too, such as members of royal family, the Minister of Education, and the General-Director of the Fine Arts Department. In other words, this *Wai Khru* ceremony re-invigorated the symbolic power of *Wai Khru* by reconnecting it with the monarchy and noblemen, and this suggested an increasing validation of the divine in the ceremony, given its reconnection with ceremonies once used within the royal household. To promote

⁵⁶ So.Tho.0701.40/81 His Majesty King Bhumibol subsidised for publishing the notes of Thai songs and film recording (พระบาทสมเด็จพระเจ้าอยู่หัวพระราชทานเงินเพื่อพิมพ์โน้ตเพลงไทยและถ่ายทำภาพยนตร์)

this ceremony, the Fine Arts Department also framed *Wai Khru* in the context of royal power, and used newspapers as a tool to endorse the *Wai Khru*, almost to officiate it and render it more sacred:

The *Wai Khru* ceremony arranged by the Fine Arts Department on this 5th October should be recorded as the substantial beginning of a revival of national arts heritage. The King presided over this ceremony and ritualised *Wai Khru* [. . .] As the King subsidized 10,000 baht for recording Thai songs and presiding over the *Wai Khru* ceremony which he never done before, it apparently showed that His Majesty intend to preserve and support Thai dance and music which represented Thai identity and entertained the people. This royal policy should undoubtedly be elevated to be a national policy which should be majorly supported and followed by every section of Thai government.

(Ko/Po7/1961/So.Tho.4.5 *Phimthai* Newspaper, 9 October 1961) translated by author

In 1963, the monarch was involved with Thai classical dance again when the Fine Arts Department invited the King to preside over the royal ritual for the transmission of the most sacred *Ong Phra Phirap* dance. This dance was believed to be the highest level of the *Naphat* repertoire in *Wai Khru* ceremony. As a part of the King's project to record the *Naphat* dance repertoire, in 1963, the Fine Arts Department lead by M. R. Kukrit Pramoj, a member of the royal family and a renowned historian, was concerned about the disappearance of *Ong Phra Phirap*. To pass on the *Ong Phra Phirap*, it was believed a special ritual was required. At that time, there was only one teacher, Nai Rongpakdee (Jian Jarujaron), who was authorised to dance the *Ong Phra Phirap*, but he did not have a right to pass this dance on. Therefore, a royal ritual to pass on *Ong Phra Phirap* dance was arranged on 24 January 1963 at Amporn Satharn, Dusit palace (Boonyachai, 2003:12). The King was invited to preside over the ceremony and he invited four dancers, who were Arkom Sayakom, Aram Intharanat, Yat Changthong, and Yosang Pakdeetawa.

After the ceremony, the *Ong Phra Phirap* dance was officially legitimated and empowered by the monarch and state and this tradition of transmission has been continually preserved and passed on until the present day. However, the complexity involved in the transmission of *Ong Phra Phirap* will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

After the King's status was revived in the 1950s, he was considered to be the highest spiritual authority of Thai society. The Fine Arts Department attempted to implicate classical dance with royal power in order to bring the spirituality of court dance back into state classical dance. The Fine Arts Department invited the King again to preside over the special ritual of a royal, investing in him the right of being the master of *Wai Khru* in 1984. This special event was arranged because Arkom Sayakom, the master teacher of *Wai Khru*, suddenly died without passing on the right to be a *Wai Khru* master to any of his pupils. Sayakom received the ritual right from Luang Vilard Wongram and led the *Wai Khru* ceremony from 1962 until 1982 (Sayakom, 1982). This special ritual of royal investiture was not only for passing on the right to be master of *Wai Khru* but also for passing on the right to dance the *Ong Phra Phirap*. In this royal ceremony, the King instated five teachers as masters to conduct *Wai Khru* ceremonies and seven teachers for the dance, *Ong Phra Phirap*.⁵⁷ Due to royal involvement, the process by which the state designated the lineage of being master of *Wai Khru* and the *Ong Phra Phirap* was further elevated in legitimacy as a royal lineage. Even though today the transmission of becoming a master and dancing the *Ong Phra Phirap* is arranged by the Fine Arts Department, no

⁵⁷ The five teachers invested for being master of *Wai Khru* were Therayudth Youngsri, Thongchai Phothayarom, Thongsuk Thonglim, Audom Aungsuthon, Sombati Kaewsujarit. The seven teachers invested for dance *Ong Phra Phirap* were Rakhop Bhodivesa, Chaiyot Khummanee, Jatuporn Rattanawaraha, Jumpol Jotidatt, Soodjit Phansang, Siriphan Attawatchara, Somsak Tadt

longer under the influence of the King, the sense of sacredness and royal power remain instilled in the dancers' beliefs.

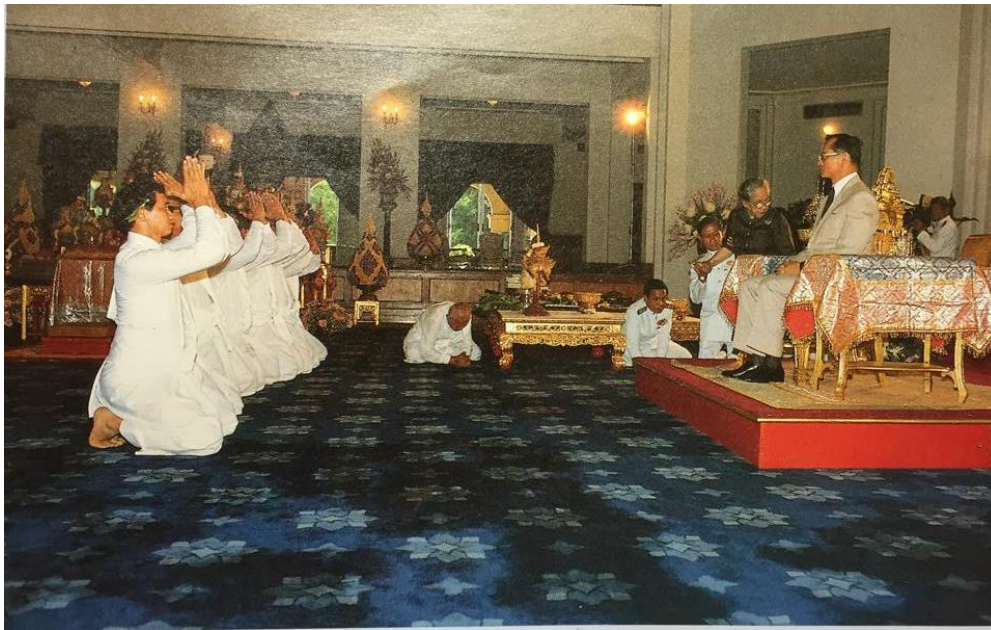


Figure 3.8. Transmission of Royal Ritual Rights in 1984. Image courtesy of the Fine Arts Department, 1990:7

The Publication and Propagation of *Wai Khru* Ceremony

The Fine Arts Department played an important role in setting the standard for the *Wai Khru* ceremony not only for the ritual itself, but also for the publications of the ceremony. As with the project of cultural revivalism, one of the main tasks was to propagate knowledge of dance and traditions. Publication is a powerful aid in disseminating to, and instilling knowledge of *Wai Khru* and its spiritual elements in new generations, and Thai society more broadly. As evidence indicates, most studies of the *Wai Khru* ceremony in Thailand still refer to the booklet published by the Fine Arts Department in 1960. My argument is that even though *Wai Khru* is ritualised for participants and within dance culture, publications and propagations from the state are powerful in legitimating and authorising the ritual.

In the early 1950s, the Fine Arts Department began to publish a book about the *Wai Khru* ceremony. The first publication entitled *Wai Khru ceremony, Text of the Initiation Rite of the Khon-Lakhon Ritual Including Legend and Verse of Wai Khru Lakhon Chatri*, was compiled by Dhanit Yupho. It was first published as a memorial on the seventh day of the funeral and royal cremation of Phraya Anirutava, who was a royal page of King Mongkut. This book gathered various procedures of the ancient *Wai Khru* ceremony in different categories of dance drama; *Wai Khru* in *Lakhon Chatri*, *Lakhon Nok* and *Lakhon Nai*. Each of these ceremonies has different procedures for the *Wai Khru* which depends on how each of the dance societies construct their own *Wai Khru*. This book also contained the 2 main historical records of Royal *Wai Khru* for royal dancers and musicians mentioned earlier. The first document was the copy of the royal command in the reign of King Rama IV (King Mongkut) concerning the *Wai Khru* ceremony of the royal dance troupe in the year of the Tiger (1854) at the Dusit Maha Prasat Throne Hall (the Fine Arts Department, 1960:8), and the second was the Royal *Wai Khru* in the reign of King Rama VI (King Vajiravudh) held on Wednesday and Thursday, 13-14 May 1914 at the Theatre of Chitralada Villa Royal Residence (Ibid:34). These texts described the grand ceremony of initiation in the *Wai Khru* including the details of food offerings, collections of *Khon* masks in elaborate altars, and procedures for *Wai Khru* and *Naphat* repertoires. This book now has become the main reference for scholars who write about the history of *Wai Khru* ceremony in Thailand.

Newspapers have also played a major role in the propagation of *Wai Khru* ceremony. The Fine Arts Department used newspapers as tools to disseminate *Wai Khru* and emphasise its more sacred elements. On 10 June 1961, articles on the *Wai Khru* at the School of Dramatic Arts were published in various newspapers such as the *Prachatiptai*, the

Chaothai and the *Siamnikorn* (So.Tho.0701.37/65⁵⁸). This *Wai Khru* ceremony was distinguished from previous ceremonies, in that the Fine Arts Department was attempting to revive the extraordinary ritual of the royal *Wai Khru* in the reign of King Rama VI. The special ritual of *Phiti Yuanyatra* or the ritual of human sacrifice was highlighted and promoted in the newspaper. It is worth noting that this revival of a royal *Wai Khru* took place before the King was personally involved in the *Wai Khru* ceremony. In an imitation of the *Phiti Yuanyatra* ritual, the General-Director of the Fine Arts Department, Dhanit Yupho, acted in the place of the King and presided over in the ritual. Yet, the process of the ritual was different in that the master pretended to cut off the heads of leading dancers and Dhanit pleaded for his life, while the original ritual demonstrated the opposite. This revived ritual changed the meaning of the original, which aimed at demonstrating the power of the teacher. Moreover, this *Wai Khru* was different from the previous *Wai Khru* because it was not performed only for the students but was also made public to foreigners and members of the royal family. This started to change the function of *Wai Khru*, particularly shifting the ritualistic focus on the relationship between teacher and student into, predominantly, a symbol of Thai national identity. It can be seen in the statement from the *Siamnikorn* as follows:

The School of Dance and Music, the Fine Arts Department, arranged the grand *Wai Khru* ceremony which was completely performed as an ancient *Wai Khru*, on 6 June 1961. This ceremony sacrificed by using human to worship the teacher. Many foreigners were interested in and attended this ceremony.

The Dance *Wai Khru* was started at 10.00 after finished paying homage to teacher of general education. The ceremony was divided into two sections; *Wai Khru* in dance and *Wai Khru* in music. The music *Wai Khru* presided over by Khru Montri Tramote and the

⁵⁸ So.Tho.0701.37/65 About *Wai Khru* Ceremony from newspapers during 1961-1962 (ข่าวคัดจากหนังสือพิมพ์ 1961)

dance *Wai Khru* presided over by Luang Virade Wonggram. In particular, the dance *Wai Khru* in this year was completely performed as it had been performed by King Mongkut when it was last performed at Chitralada Villa Royal Residence in 1914. In that *Wai Khru* ceremony, there was sacrificed by human who was a leading dancers and then someone plead for his life. In this *Wai Khru*, the School of Dance [made a symbolic] sacrifice to teachers in Thongsuk Thonglim who was a leading dancer of the Fine Arts Department. Thongsuk was tied with a pillar in front of the altar, and then Luang Virade Wonggram danced with sword pretending to cut off his head. Suddenly, Dhanit Yupho, the General-Director of the Fine Arts Department, pleaded for his life [. . .] In this *Wai Khru* ritual, there were numerous members of royal family and foreigners attending this ceremony. (Siamnikorn,1961) translated by author



Figure 3.9. The revival *Wai Khru* Ceremony published in the newspaper

(So.Tho.0701.37/65:15 Siamnikorn, Saturday 10 June, 1961)

In an attempt by the state to promote *Wai Khru* ceremony in public, the booklet of the *Wai Khru* ceremony written by Dhanit Yupho (1961) was published in English. This book was one of twenty-five booklets on Thai culture series, published by the Promotion and Public Relations Sub-Division, the Fine Arts Department.⁵⁹ The purpose of this publication was ‘to provide opportunities for foreigners to study, understand and appreciate Thai culture in a simplified way prior to visiting Thailand’ (Yupho, 1990). The *Wai Khru* booklet was reprinted in five editions which were published in 1961, 1964, 1970, 1974 and 1990 respectively. This book described the formalised version of *Wai Khru* as it was practiced at the School of Dramatic Arts, which was the largest *Wai Khru* in Thailand and open to the public. In this book, Yupho also summarised the rites of the events and highlighted the importance of the *Wai Khru* ceremony and how it was necessary for teachers and pupils. This book also emphasised the immense belief of teachers that the rite of *Wai Khru* is necessary for the success of dancers and musicians, no matter how talented and well-trained they are. Those who are disrespectful to or disobey their teachers may be struck down by misfortune, illness, or even death (Yupho, *The Custom and Rite of Paying Homage to Teacher of Khon, Lakhon and Piphat*, 1961:8).

The belief in the power of the teacher can be obviously seen in the pedagogy of Thai dance in that the improvisations or choreography in Thai classical dance are allowed only for top dancers with the approval of the teachers. As Klinchan (2015) and Phanturak (2015), junior dancers in the Office of Performing Arts, clarified in an interview, even though they had about ten years experiences of dancing, they still had to practice or

⁵⁹ The 25 booklets on Thai culture series were 1. Introduction Cultural Thailand in Outline 2. The Royal Monasteries and Their Significance 3. Shadow Play 4. Thai Buddhist Art 5. Thai Lacquer Works 6. The Khon 7. Khon Masks 8. Contemporary art in Thailand 9. Thai Literature in Relation to The Diffusion of her Cultures 10. The nature and Development of the Thai Language 11. The Custom of Rite of Paying Homage to Teachers of Khon lakhon and Piphat 12. Thai Wood Carvings 13. The Preliminary Course of Training in Thai Theatrical Art 14. Thai Traditional Salutation 15. Thai Music 16. Thai Music in Western Notation 17. An Appreciation of Sukhothai Art 18. Thai Images or The Buddha 19. What is a Buddha Image? 20. Thai traditional Painting 21. The Maha Chat 22. The Tosachat in Thai Painting 23. The Royal Palaces 24. The Development of The National Museums in Thailand 25. Dharmacakra (The Wheel of the Law)

receive approval from their senior teachers before performing on stage. Rutnin (1983) points out that, in Thai dance society, dancers have been taught to be modest and respect their teachers, predecessors and senior dancers. In addition, the spirits of teachers associated with Thai classical dance are revered as *Khru Raeng* (teacher with great power). Before performing the dances, the dancers worship the spirits of the Khru at the altar of worship which is usually arranged behind the stage. On the altar, there are masks of Bharata Rishi (Creator of Bharata Natayasastra), and other gods, such as *Phra Phirap*, Siva (from the *Ramayana*). Dancers always salute the mask or headdress before wearing it, entering the stage or beginning a difficult piece of dance on stage, the dancers begin to perform the *Wai Khru* by putting their hands together in a salutation gesture to the spirit of the Khru.

The publication was powerful because it succeeded in strengthening and reconstructing not only the beliefs of dancers in the *Wai Khru* but also because it standardised the qualification for the role of Master of *Wai Khru* ceremony. No historical evidence had previously recorded what the qualification to be Master of *Wai Khru* should be, except as expressed in the book published by the Fine Arts Department in the early 1960s. Traditionally, to perform or lead the *Wai Khru* ceremony, a master must receive permission from his own teachers. Teachers carefully discern both dance skills as well as standards of morality that deem them worthy of becoming the next *Wai Khru* master, in outstanding pupils. The former master of *Wai Khru* hands down to his student the ritual text (*The Oongkann Wai Khru*) which contains an invocation or benediction, which the new master must then learn to chant (Yupho, 1961:4). Generally, the initiated master politely waits until the former master dies or gets an approval from the teacher before actually presiding over the ceremony. All the traditional presiding masters in the *Wai Khru* were recorded in the book entitled *The Custom and Rite of Paying Homage to Teachers of Khon, Lakhon and Piphat* in 1961. This book also emphasised the gender

discrimination that the master of *Wai Khru* ‘must be a man’ and highlighted that ‘it is believed that the female touch will not bring success to an initiation: only misfortune will befall either the initiated or the initiator or both’ (Yupho, 1961:5). As a result of this literally recorded and oral tradition, this belief has been continually preserves until the present day.

Today, the transmission and qualification of the *Wai Khru* master, particularly in the royal line has been restricted by the Fine Arts Department. Traditionally, to preside as the master of *Wai Khru*, the right was directly transmitted from the teacher to the pupil. However, this relationship between teacher and student was changed after the mid-1980s with the King’s intervention. According to Boonyachai’s research (1997), after Arkom Sayakom—the master of *Wai Khru* between 1962-1982—suddenly died without passing on the right to his pupil, the Fine Arts Department had to invite the King to preside over the ceremony of investiture. Due to this special event, the criteria of being a master began to be officially recorded and gradually restricted. A master should conform to these following criteria (the Fine Arts Department, 1985): the masters have to be men who are at least fifty years old; they have to have ordained as a Buddhist monk at some point in their lives; they have to have an expertise in performing hero or demon characters of *Khon*; they have to demonstrate moral characteristics such as respect for senior teachers. The candidate master would be chosen by committees and need to get approval from every former masters. In my interview with Sombati Kaewsujarit, who was invested to be a master by the King in 1984, it was explained that to receive the right to be a master today is different from past traditions of the same right. According to the new system, teachers are unable to pass on the right to their own pupil directly, but they have to nominate their pupils to the committee for approval. As Kaewsujarit (2015) explained,

[T]he criteria have to be fulfilled and the committee has to approve, with a greater weight from the opinion of his master. Unlike in the past that the masters could pass on the right

to their preferred pupils, today the set of criteria must be followed. The masters are not allowed to pass on the right to just anybody.

Translated by author

The Spiritual in Classical Dance: the Relationship between Dance drama and *Wai Khru*

The sacredness of *Khon* and *Lakhon* can be found in the relationship between the *Naphat* repertoire in *Wai Khru* ceremony and in the *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance dramas. The *Naphat* repertoire refers to the ritual music used in the *Wai Khru* ceremony. In this section, I will analyse the spiritual element in Thai classical dance, particularly in the *Naphat* dance piece which is known as a teacher's piece, or a high piece considered to be a sacred dance. In the *Wai Khru* ceremony, *Naphat* musical repertoires are chosen to function in each process for inviting the spirits of Gods, hermits, and teachers to the ceremonial space, one at a time. *Naphat* repertoires are not only used to represent the *Khru* Gods in *Wai Khru* ceremony, but also in *Khon* and *Lakhon* to depict verbal or physical movements through particular actions, such as walking, sleeping, fighting and manifesting supernatural powers. Therefore, the *Naphat* repertoire is respected by Thai dancers and musicians as sacred pieces which are shown by them raising hands to salute teachers before performing the particular *Naphat*.

In order to understand the spirituality of *Naphat* dance pieces, the historical background and function of *Naphat* repertoires need to be considered. Montri Tramote (1964), the renowned musician, indicates that *Naphat* repertoires are considered as the oldest music tunes in Thailand, which have probably been performed since the early eighteenth century. Traditionally, the purpose to perform *Naphat* repertoires was not one of entertainment, but they were used in various rituals such as in the Buddhist monk ceremony, the soul-tying ritual, tonsure ceremony and the *Wai Khru* ceremony

(Phukhaothong, 1996). This is the reason why *Naphat* in Thai society was known as a spiritual song and contains a sense of holiness in Thai beliefs.

Naphat dance pieces were believed to be sacred because there are many beliefs and customs behind the dance itself. There were about three hundred musical pieces in *Naphat* repertoire (Tramote, 1983:13), but not all of those have dance gestures in the pieces. Phukhaothong (1996:214) suggested that the musical piece came first and the dance gestures were composed later. Each piece has a fixed gesture of dance movement which has been taught by one generation to the next and it was necessary to perform correctly. Kritkhan (2012:6), the prominent Thai dance scholar, indicates that to perform *Naphat* dance, dancers have to concentrate their attention on the accompaniment of dance gestures with the rhythm of the piece. If the dancers make a mistake in performing *Naphat*, they have to apologise to their teacher. Moreover, it is a custom that students, both in dance and music, must receive permission to study *Naphat* by attending the second level of *Wai Khru* called *Khrob Khru* or being ‘covered’ before starting to learn *Naphat*, which I have mentioned earlier.

As the *Naphat* repertoire was used for different functions, it is undoubtedly why Thai dancers and musicians categorise the *Naphat* repertoire in different ways. Thai dancers group *Kukphat* and *Rua Samla*, the *Naphat* pieces, for instance, at a high level, while the musicians classify *Rua Samla* at a higher level than *Kukphat* because it is more difficult to play (Kritkhan, 2012:18). However, it is important to note that *Naphat* repertoires were the ancient songs which were never classified and standardised before. The classification of *Naphat* repertoire occurred in the late of 1960s when the Fine Arts Department attempted to develop the academic area of traditional performing arts and set the standard of Thai dance and music. The variation of grouping of the *Naphat* repertoire depended on the individual backgrounds of the scholars and the context. For example, Saman Noinit

(Kritkhan, 2012:14), the prominent musician in the Fine Arts Department divides up the *Naphat* repertoire into two groups: the musical piece and the dance piece. He subdivides the musical pieces into three kinds by performance context: *Naphat* used in the *Wai Khru* ceremony, *Naphat* used in Overture, and *Naphat* used in the recitation of *Mahachat* by Buddhist monks. The dance pieces were classified by the level of sacredness: primary level, middle level, and high level which depended on the hierarchy of the Gods. However, the classification of *Naphat* dance pieces was still unclear among Thai dance scholars. Boonyachai (2003:6), for example, divides *Naphat* into only two levels: general *Naphat* and high *Naphat*, by ranking up, from the simple basic form to the most elaborate and complex. The classification of *Naphat* dance was systematically recorded when the *Naphat* dances were taught in the educational system.

Thai dance scholars attempted to fix and standardise *Naphat* when they wanted to construct the dance curriculum. This is different from the traditional dance training from ancient times. In the past, the teacher handed down the high level *Naphat* dance to only the selected pupils by judging their dance abilities; not every pupil could be passed while today all students are taught high level *Naphat* in class. I will discuss the present-day transmission process in the subsequent chapter.

It is noteworthy that *Naphat* dance pieces used in dance drama were formulated and encoded by the ancient dancers which were transmitted from generation to generation. Generally, *Naphat* dance pieces were used for performing emotions of the character at the end of the long verse. In dance drama, after dancing to the text which is sung by narrators, the character dances a *Naphat* piece to mark the dramatic action. For example, *Tranimit* was used for high ranking characters changing shape, *Sa-me* was used for movement over short distance, *Chet* was used for long distance, and *Thayoi* and *Ot* pieces

were used to depict sorrow, weeping and so forth. All these codes of the *Naphat* repertoire are known by dancers and musicians.

Most Thai dance scholars (Kritkun, 2012; Boonyachai, 1997) emphasise that *Naphat* was a highly technical dance movement embodying actions of dance characters. On the contrary, Wong (2001:107) argued that ‘these pieces do not mirror action as much as they are action’. She argued by using the word ‘represent’ instead of ‘embodies’. I partly agree with Wong that the *Naphat* piece was a symbolic dance to present actions which were not aimed at showing the feelings of characters. Most dance gestures were adapted from the basic dance movements which have no inherent meaning and those were similar across various *Naphat* performances. However, as my own experience of performing *Naphat* dance might indicate, the word ‘embody’, I take here to mean ‘energy’ rather than ‘action’. Whenever I performed the high level of *Naphat*, I felt a power and inner energy generate from within me. The inner energy was generated physically by the dance gesture, and it was psychologically created in me by the sound of the drum which I had to concentrate on. Even though this process of inner energy also occurred when I performed other dances, it was strongest in the *Naphat* dance, probably because the sense of its sacredness was embedded in the beliefs of the dancers.

The Invention of Tradition of Passing on the *Ong Phra Phirap* Dance

This section concentrates on the most sacred ritual, *Ong Phra Phirap*, which is used for inviting *Phra Phirap* into the ritual. *Phra Phirap* is believed to be the one of the major deities of dance, which is why the *Phra Phirap* mask is also used in the ritual of ‘covering’ in *Wai Khru* ceremony. Traditionally, dancers believe, the *Ong Phra Phirap* piece is the highest level of the *Naphat* dance, which only the specially chosen and trained dancers can perform. In addition, the dancer must fulfil qualifications such as having advanced dance ability, acquiring the appropriate knowledge and be a morally good individual. I

argue that all of these criteria were established by the Fine Arts Department in the early 1960s. In this section, I will focus on the power of the state in setting the new standard of the *Ong Phra Phirap* and inventing a new tradition of passing on the right to perform it. Moreover, I will discuss the change in the relationship between teacher and student after state control, focussing on the two lineages of *Ong Phra Phirap* dance, the royal line and the unofficial line.

In order to understand the spirituality surrounding the *Ong Phra Phirap* dance, it is important to consider the faith in *Phra Phirap* and the importance of deities in Thai society. It is also necessary to examine why *Phra Phirap* was regarded as the most sacred teacher of classical dance and drama. Many scholars (Rutnin, 1993; Boonyachai, 1997 and Kritkun, 2012) attempt to answer this question by tracking the historical belief of *Phra Phirap* in Thai society. Rutnin points out that ‘the Thai name *Phirap* could have been derived from *Bhairava*’ (1993:18-19). However, the origins of *Phra Phirap* are contradictory. On the one hand, *Phra Phirap* was a destructive form of the lord Siva in Hinduism (Rutnin, 1993: 19), which is the religion of Khmer, the main kingdom, during the early Autthaya period (Kritkun, 2012: 41). On the other hand, in the *Ramayana*, *Phra Phirap* was portrayed as an unimportant demon character, who was the guard of the lord Siva’s golden mango orchard. In this story, *Phra Phirap* was killed by Rama because he tried to abduct Sida, Rama’s wife. Therefore, most scholars (Rutnin, 1983; Kritkun, 2012) assume that *Phra Phirap* as a Thai deity of dance is derived from Hindu mythology rather than from the *Ramayana* episode.

The question we might want to ask is when *Ong Phra Phirap* dance was first performed and what the occasion to perform this dance was. To answer the first question, it is necessary to distinguish the music and dance traditions of *Naphat*. The music of *Naphat Ong Phra Phirap* was traditionally played in *Wai Khru* ceremonies in the late 1890s,

while the dance movement was later choreographed in the late 1920s (Sukhonthachat, 1979:28). In other words, the *Ong Phra Phirap* dance arrived later than the music. *Ong Phra Phirap* dance was first choreographed and performed on 16 November 1927 on the occasion of the royal celebration of a White Elephant for the King Rama VII. This short episode was performed in front of the throne of King Rama VII and the Queen Rampaipannee at Dusit Palace (Sukhonthachat, 1979: 28). This episode of *Phra Phirap* has rarely been performed on stage because of the belief in preserving its sacredness. From 1927 to the present, the episode of *Phra Phirap* has only been staged 3 times by the Fine Arts Department. The first time was in 1927 which I have mentioned above. The second time it was performed was on the occasion of celebrating the first year anniversary of the constitution on 11 December 1932 at Sanam Luang (the royal plaza). The third performance was on 5 March 1962 in the music festival at Sangkrit Sala, the National Museum (Sukhonthachat, 1979: 29-31).

It is significant to discuss who the choreographer of *Ong Phra Phirap* was because it impacted the emergence of two versions of the dance: from Phraya Natthakanurak and Khunying Natthakanurak. Phraya and Khunying Natthakanurak were a renowned couple and dance masters from Royal Entertainment in the reign of King Rama VI and later transferred to become dance masters in the Fine Arts Department in 1934. The official line or royal line of *Ong Phra Phirap* records choreography by Phraya Natthakanurak, while the unofficial line was composed by Khunying Natthakanurak. The unofficial line or Khunying Natthakanurak's lineage was rarely known by Thai dancers because it was not accepted by the Fine Arts Department. Thus, while the discussion of the two lineages in Thai dance society remains a very sensitive issue, it emerges as important evidence to support my argument about the authority of the state in standardising classical dance. This question of who originally choreographed the dance was raised because of contradictory evidence between publications from the Fine Arts Department and data

from my interviews with dance teachers. The historical record from the book entitled *Phra Phirap* written by Praphan Sukhontachat and published in 1979 indicated that Phraya Natakanurak was the choreographer, while dance teachers believed that Khunying Natakanurak, his wife, choreographed this dance. In interviews with Suwanee Chalanukhro (2015)—the senior dance master who was awarded as the national artist in 1990—and Chulachart Aranyanak (2015), a *Khon* master who received the right to dance *Ong Phra Phirap*, they explained to me that they believed that Khunying Natthakanurak was the choreographer rather than Phraya Natthakanurak. According to them, the dance character *Phra Phirap* was a demon character and because Khunying Natthakanurak performed the role of a demon character—while her husband, Phraya Natthakanurak performed the hero character—she was the main choreographer. I will further analyse the complexity of the two lineages in the following section.

The Emergence of Two Versions of *Ong Phra Phirap* and the State Authority

During the 1920s, both Khunying and Phaya Natthakanurak were dance masters in the Fine Arts Department and they were the co-directors of the first performance of the *Ong Phra Phirap* dance in 1927. In 1936, during their employment in the Fine Arts Department, Phraya Natthkanurak passed away. Soon after there was internal conflict within the Fine Arts Department, during which Khunying Natthakanurak resigned, opened her private dance school and handed down the *Ong Phra Phirap* to her pupils. This began the emergence of the two lineages of *Ong Phra Phirap* dance: the royal line and the unofficial line. The royal line was officially arranged by the Fine Arts Department and the unofficial line was privately arranged by Khunying Natthakanurak's disciples. Khunying Natthakurak's dance version was somewhat different and more complex than those from the Fine Arts Department (interview with Aranyanak and Pongpandecha, who are trained in both versions). However, state control ensured that the version of the Fine Arts Department was elevated as the official dance, while Khun Ying Natthakanurak's

version was disdained, even though she may have been the choreographer of the *Ong Phra Phirap*.

The Official Version of *Ong Phra Phirap* Dance

The version of *Ong Phra Phirap* dance from the Fine Arts Department was legitimated to be an official version because of state authority and the King's intervention. In view of the relationship between the state and monarch in 1961, discussed earlier, the ruling King Bhumibhol had begun a project to record the *Naphat* dance repertoire in order to preserve Thai classical dance. Almost fifty *Naphat* dance pieces were recorded and one of those was the *Ong Phra Phirap*, performed by Nai Rongpakdee, otherwise known as, Jean Jarujaron (So.Tho.0701.40/81:46-48⁶⁰). As per his belief in the sacredness of *Ong Phra Phirap* dance, Nai Rongpakdee himself did not dare to pass on the dance to his pupil. In 1963, as the state become concerned about disappearance of *Ong Phra Phirap* dance and belief in royalty, the Fine Arts Department invited the King to bestow four teachers with the right to dance and pass on *Naphat Ong Phra Phirap* (Sukhonthachat,1979: 10). Therefore, the royal custom of passing on the tradition of *Ong Phra Phiraap* dance was first arranged on 24 January 1963 at the Amphon Sathan Villa, at Dusit palace with a large audience comprising of royal families, artists and government officers. This event was also disseminated in various newspapers; for instance, in the *Pimthai* and the *Siamrat* (Ko.Po7.1963 So.Tho.8.3⁶¹). Moreover, the entire royal ritual was textually recorded by Prapan Sukhonthachat, *Khon* narrator of the Fine Arts Department, and later published in *Phra Phirap* in 1979. It can be said that this royal ceremony began the new tradition of passing on the right to perform *Ong Phra Phirap* dance, subsequently officiating the state version of the *Ong Phra Phirap* with the King's approval.

⁶⁰ So.Tho.0701.40:46-48 the records of *Naphat* Dance and Music under the King's project

⁶¹ Ko.Po7.1963 So.Tho.8.3 The newspaper published in 1963



Figure 3.10. The first royal ceremony of passing on *Ong Phra Phirap* dance in 1963. Image courtesy of the Fine Arts Department

It is interesting to note that after royal involvement in 1963, the royal film of *Ong Phra Phirap* dance performed by Nai Rongpakdee became an original piece which was used as a model to pass on the dance to the new generations. From 1963 to the present, the right to perform *Ong Phra Phirap* was passed on over two generations arranged by the Fine Arts Department. The second occasion of passing on *Ong Phra Phirap* dance took

place on 25 October 1984 at Dusitdalai Hall, Chitralada Villa Royal Resident. This ceremony was presided over by the King and on that same occasion, there was a ceremony for royal dance teachers to become masters of *Wai Khru*. In this royal ceremony, only one of four dancers, Yat Changthong who passed on the dance from Nai Rongpakdee in 1963, was still alive and Nai Rongpakdee was eighty-six; he was too old to perform. Therefore, the royal film recorded in 1963 was used as a prototype model to pass on *Ong Phra Phirap* dance (Boonyachai, 2003:15). In this event, seven dancers were chosen to receive the right to perform and pass on *Ong Phra Phirap* dance. The third time was recently arranged on 12 September 2002 at the National Theatre when there were fourteen dancers selected to inherit the dance. The table below shows the four generations of official line of passing on the tradition of *Ong Phra Phirap* dance (the Fine Arts Department, 2009).

Phaya Natthakanurak the choreographer of <i>Ong Phra Phirap</i> Dance	
1. 15 November 1927	Mr. Rongpukdee (Jean Jarujaron)
2. 24 January 1963	1. Mr.Aram Intharanat 2. Mr.Yosang Pakdeetawa 3. Mr.Arkorn Sayakorn 4. Mr. Yat Changthong
3. 25 October 1984	1. Mr. Rakhop Bhodivesa 2. Mr. Chaityot khummanee 3. Mr. Jatuporn Rattanawaraha 4. Mr. Jumpol Jotidatt 5. Mr. Soodjit Phansang 6. Mr. Siriphan Attawatchara 7. Mr. Somsak Tadt

4. 12 September 2002	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mr. Pramet Boonyachai 2. Mr. Preecha Silapasombat 3. Mr. Manus Songprapan 4. Mr. Disatha Phothiyarom 5. Mr. Surachate Fuangfu 6. Mr. Pradit Silapasombat 7. Mr. Somrak Nakpleum 8. Mr. Sathaporn Kaorungrueng 9. Mr. Jatana Sri-am-uam 10. Mr. Warawuth Silapan 11. Mr. Domrongsak Nakprasert 12. Mr. Chulachart Aranyanak 13. Mr. Vithan Jantara 14. Mr. Chaowanat Pengsuk
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Qualifications of dancers to perform *Ong Phra Phirap*

The Fine Arts Department did not only invent the royal ritual of transmission of dance itself but also set the standard of choosing the dancer to perform the *Ong Phra Phirap*. In the fact of that is the qualifications of dancers had not been previously established. Since the 1980s however, the qualifications were gradually standardised and began to be publicised in state's documents. Many documents published by the Fine Arts Department detail the qualities of a dancer who can have the right to dance *Ong Phra Phirap*. The writer, Pramet Boonyachai, who received a right to dance the *Ong Phra Phirap* in 2002, is presently a senior dance professor at the College of Dramatic Arts, Bangkok. His essay "The Custom of Passing on the *Naphat Ong Phra Phirap*" in the *Sinlapakorn* was published in 2003. In it, he summarised the meeting of the government committee to

consider the selection of the dancers to be handed down the dance *Ong Phra Phirap* (Boonyachai, 2003: 21-23). The committee included the Head of Administration and the former dancers who received the right to pass it on.⁶² The committee emphasised four new qualifications for dancers who have rights to perform *Ong Phra Phirap*. The first condition is that the dancer must be a government officer of the Fine Arts department who performs the character of the demon, and is appropriately knowledgeable and highly skilled in dance. Normally, the characters in classical dance are divided into four main characters: hero, heroine, monkey and demon, as mentioned previously. *Ong Phra Phirap* dance is the demon dance, therefore, to specify the demon character is essential to standardising *Ong Phra Phirap* dance. The second is that the dancer should be at least forty years old, and has been ordained into monkhood. If not, he must be ordained within one year after receiving the right to perform the dance. The third is that the dancer should have high moral standards and be grateful to the senior teacher. The last one is that the dancer should follow government regulations. These qualifications have now become the new standard for passing on the dance *Ong Phra Phirap* for preservation amidst new generations.

These new standards of choosing the dancer formalised the sanctity of the *Ong Phra Phirap* dance, especially in the specifications of the demon character and the obligation to be a monk. In terms of Thai classical dance training, the dancers have to train intensely in a specific character until that character is embodied into their dance skills. In an interview with Aranyanak, he indicated that it was important for the dancer to have the training background of the demon character because *Ong Phra Phirap* dance was the highest level of the *Naphat* repertoire, which contains many highly skilled movements. If

⁶² The committee were Sombati Kaewsujarit, Rakhop Bhodivesa, Jatuporn Rattanawaraha, Jumpol Jotidatt, Soodjit Phansang, Somsak Tadt, Patnee Promsombat, Aupaiwan Dachakarn (Boonyachai, 2003:21).

the dancer has not trained in the demon character, it becomes difficult to dance gracefully and elaborately.

Moreover, the new obligation to be a monk is an important link between the dance, the idea of sacredness, and the limitations of gender. In Thai Buddhist belief, the ordination to become a monk is an intentional act to enrol into the sacred community. The monk has to train in Buddhist studies, monasticism, scriptural study and meditation practice (Plamintr, 2015). Monkhood in Thai society is also greatly respected in general and is regarded as a superior state of virtue and perfection. As Thai dancers regard this *Ong Phra Phirap* dance as the most sacred and representing the destructive form of the God Siva, the qualifications of dancers need to be empowered by the process of the ritual. However, this standard of monkhood not only circumscribes understandings of sacredness, but also those of gender, because only men are allowed to be ordained. Women are thus restrained from performing. However, it is interesting to note that prior to setting the standard of qualification the politics of gender manifested differently: Khunying Natthakanurak was a woman who had performed *Ong Phra Phirap* dance, and was also a teacher who handed down the unofficial version. It is noteworthy that the obligation to be a monk has been transformed into an indirect control of sexuality, which was established after state control, and this new standard will probably remain unchanged across the further generations.

The Unofficial Version of *Ong Phra Phirap*

The unofficial lineage of *Ong Phra Phirap* was established when Khunying Natthakanurak left the Fine Arts Department. In 1952, after she resigned, Natthakanurak opened her private dance school at home and advertised on the Pimthai newspaper to recruit new students (Khomwattana, 1987:158). Only one student Somyos Popiemplarp, who was twenty years old at that time, was interested in learning dance with her. Popiemplarp had

good basic dance skills, having been trained by Tip Phawawet, the wife of Nai Ongpakdee (Vithauapul, interview, 2016). Remarkably, Natthakanurak did not only hand down all *Naphat* dances to him, but also passed on the right of being the master of the *Wai Khru* ceremony. It is interesting to note that Natthakanurak was 1 of 2 women⁶³ who had permission to preside over the *Wai Khru* ceremony in dance before the gender-related limitation was established by the Fine Arts Department. She received the right to be a master from Phraya Natthakanurak, her husband (Myers-Moro, 1988:313).



Figure 3.11. Khunying Natthakanurak presiding over *Wai Khru* at Baan Nai Huad. Image courtesy of Tada Vithauapul.

In 1955, Natthakanurak handed down the right to be a master of *Wai Khru* and the *Ong Phra Phirap* dance to Popiemlarp in the annual *Wai Khru* ceremony of Baan Nai Huad dance troupe. Baan Nai Huad was a famous commercial dance troupe comprising of ordinary people which was hired to perform *Khon* dance drama in the temples around

⁶³ The other woman who has the right to be a master of *Wai Khru* was Khunying Chin Silpabanleng, the elderly daughter of Luang Pradit Phayra, a famous musician in the Reign of King Rama VI. Myer-Moro (1988:313) claimed that in these case of Khunying Natthakanurak and Khunying Chin, the family ties aided the women in the inheritance of the privilege.

Bangkok and suburbs. Popiealarp later become the main dancer of Baan Nai Huad. He continually performed Natthakanurak's dance version and passed them on his pupils. This is the beginning of the unofficial lineage transmission from that time until the present day. The chart below shows the lineage of Khunying Natthakanurak (Samranpong, interview, 2015).

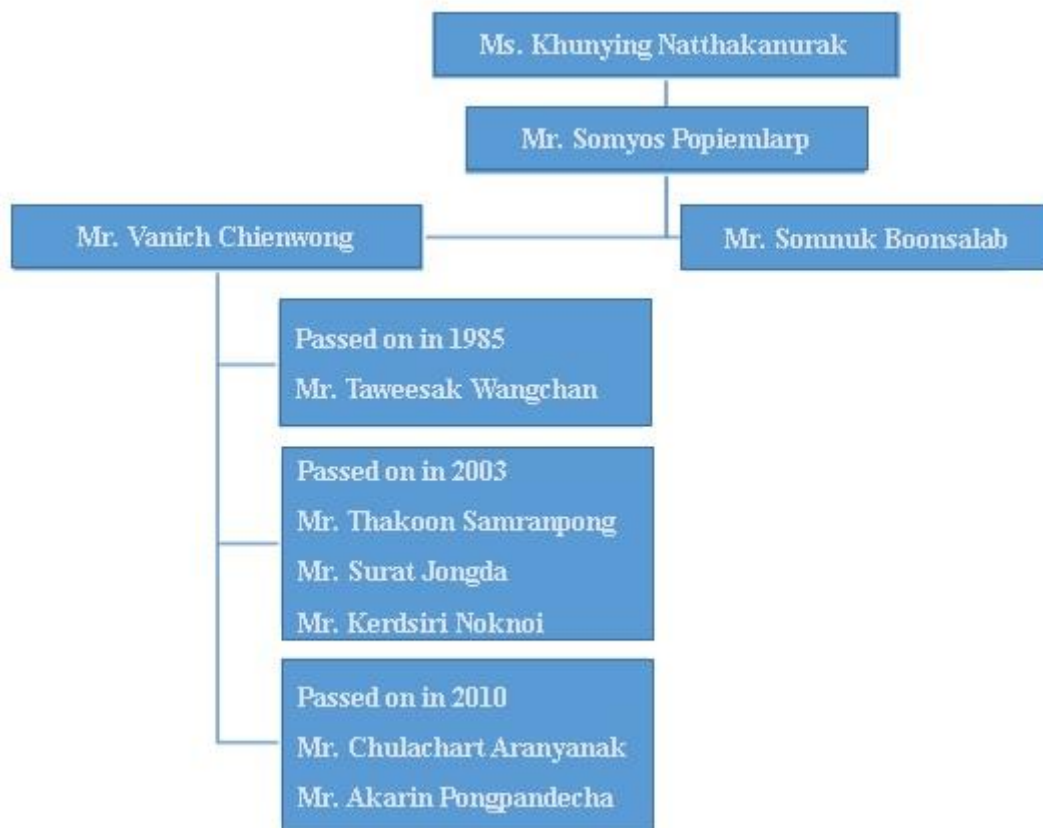


Figure 3.12. The Lineage of Khunying Natthakanurak

There were many differences in teaching the *Naphat* repertoire between the royal line and unofficial line, especially in the *Naphat* dance pieces and techniques of dance pedagogy. Khomwattana (1987:158) summarised from an interview with Popiemplarp that Natthakanurak taught all *Naphat* dances, not just the *Ong Phra Phirap*, but also other higher levels, for example, *Naphat Rusikalakod*, *Tra Pra Kanet*, *Tra Theapdamnean*, *Tra Phra Auma* and so forth, which were never taught in the Fine Arts Department. Some of

these dances disappeared in Thai society; as Kritkhan (2012:19) asserts, when the dance was not included in the dance curriculum, it ceased to exist. However, the pupils of this unofficial line attempted to revive and continually transmit their lineage, even though it was not accepted by the Fine Arts Department (Samranpong, interview, 2015). Thakoon Samranpong, who had trained with Popiemplarp, explained to me that the way in which Popiemplarp taught *Naphat* to him was different from those training in dance class today. Popiemplarp taught him to listen to the rhythmic pattern of the drum instead of melody, while in dance class today, the students are taught to count the beats of dance movement. From my experience of dancing *Naphat*, Popiemplarp's way of teaching is very helpful for the dancer to coordinate dance gestures with the music. Unfortunately, this way of traditional dance teaching can rarely be found in class today; there are just a few senior teachers who still teach students through this technique.

The process of passing on the dance in the unofficial line differed from that of the Fine Arts Department, especially in the relationship between teacher and student. In the state's lineage, the dancer must meet a specific standard and be selected by the committee, while in the unofficial lineage, the qualification is more flexible and depends on the teacher's judgement. In the unofficial line, the teacher passed on the dance to the pupils whom they trusted personally, instead of assessing their dance abilities and background. Samranpong, who danced as part of the unofficial lineage, explained to me that he received the right to perform *Ong Phra Phirap* from Vanich Chienwong, a pupil of Popiemplarp, in 2003. Samranpong noted that even though he did not perform the demon character, he was handed down the *Ong Phra Phirap* because they have a close relationship and Chienwong feared the demise of the lineage.



Figure 3.13. The ceremony of passing down the right of *Ong Phra Phirap* dance for unofficial lineage, 29 July 2010. Image courtesy of Akarin Pongpandecha.

In terms of dance movement, Natthakanurak's version was more complex and complete than those of the Fine Arts Department. *Ong Phra Phirap* is quite long, and takes about twenty minutes to perform. The *Ong Phra Phirap* dance comprises of five main parts: *Sian*, *Pan*, *Ong Phra*, *Ron*, and *Pan Ching*, and then ends with *Naphat Phathom* (Boonyachai, 2003:22). In the version of the Fine Arts Department, the dancer is off-stage during the *Sian* Part, while in the unofficial version they perform the whole piece. When I interviewed Aranyanak, the dancer who was passed on the dance through both versions, he also explained to me that the unofficial version was more complex because it contained more varied dance gestures than the royal version. He pointed out that some of the basic gestures of the demon character which are not found in any other repertoire of dance were found in this version of Natthakanurak's dance. This is also why it was affirmed for him that Natthakanurak's version was the original one which I have mentioned earlier.



Figure 3.14. *Ong Phra Phirap* dance performed by Kerdsiri Noknoi in the annual *Wai Khru* Ceremony organised by the Kaikaew dance troupe in 2011. Image courtesy of Kerdsiri Noknoi.

It is interesting to note here that the standard of choosing the dancer to perform *Ong Phra Phirap* established by the Fine Arts Department is currently affecting those in the unofficial line. This might be because some of the new generations of the unofficial lineage have a relationship to the Fine Arts Department. When I conducted an interview with a dancer from the unofficial line about their transmission in the future, they said that they would rather follow the state rule. From the interview with Kerdsiri Noknoi, one of the dancers who frequently performs the *Ong Phra Phirap* dance, was a student and teacher at the Bunditpatanasilpa for seven years and is currently a lecturer in the dance department of Mahasarakham University. He explained to me that he believes this new established rule by the Fine Arts Department is the standard custom to be followed. There is no doubt that such an attitude in a new generation of dancers which emphasises the superiority of the state in representing the standard culture among Thai dancers. This is the legacy of the formal standard.

Conclusion

The reconstruction of the custom and rite of paying homage to teachers, the *Wai Khru* ceremony, and the invention of passing on the tradition of the most sacred of all dances, the *Ong Phra Phirap*, were some processes through which the state emphasised the spiritual quality of classical dance, by connecting rituals with royal power, pedagogy and dance practice. The *Wai Khru* ceremony and the ritual of passing on the *Ong Phra Phirap* dance were resurrected and redefined under the project of traditional revival in the mid-1940s. The publications and propagations of the *Wai Khru* ceremony were used by the Fine Arts Department in disseminating and standardising the ceremony, which later become the norm in Thai society. *Wai Khru* was used as an instrument to regulate and standardise classical dance, and demonstrates the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students because of its complex relationship to dance pedagogy and the new educational system. Moreover, other spiritual links in classical dance can be found in the

relationships between the *Naphat* dance, the *Wai Khru* Ceremony, and *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance dramas. The invention of disseminating the *Ong Phra Phirap* dance was evidence of state and royal intervention in classical dance, which powerfully authorised the standardisation of classical dance and resulted in the emergence of two versions: the royal version and an unofficial version. However, these two rituals of classical dance will continue to exist in Thai society not only because of preservation under the bureaucratic and educational systems, but also because, as Wong notes of the *Wai Khru* ceremony, 'It is no museum relic or folkloricised practice; on the contrary, it is vital because it remains central to performer's belief system' (2001:249).

Chapter 4

State and Education in Thai Dance

After the revolution of 1932, when the system of absolute monarchy was overthrown and replaced with a new democratic state, the patronage of the court dance was changed from royal to state support. The state patronage did not only change the function of court dance from elite entertainment to public property as a national dance of Thailand, but also changed the dance training from traditional transmission to a new educational system. This chapter focuses on the shift of dance training after the state founded the School of Dance and Music in 1934 for training classical dance, which is currently the main dance institute under the administration of the Department of Fine Arts. This establishment of a national dance school was the most significant turning point of social history of dance which resulted in the state monopoly on classical dance.

Since 1934 the state has been the most influential proponent of court dance, and has disseminated court dance all over Thailand. The court dance training was officially established in the curriculum in the School of Dance and Music, which was adopted from the French *L'École des Beaux-Arts* and *l'Académie de Danse et Musique* in 1934 (Rutnin, 1993: 189). From 1971, with the purpose of disseminating classical dance as the national dance, Regional Dramatic Art Colleges were set up in various regions of Thailand, expanding to thirteen provinces, awarding dance Bachelor degrees (Koanantakool, 2002:224). In the period 1960-1975, Thai dance and music lessons were classified as 'art education', which became a compulsory subject and was taught in almost every school in Thailand, resulting in a shortage of dance teachers (Chandrasu, 2011:5). In order to meet the demand for Thai dance teachers, a number of dance teacher training institutes under the Thai government's Teacher Training Department have been established. Moreover, from 1990s to the present, there has been an increasing number of dance curricula in many universities, offering the Thai classical dance course as an academic discipline.

In this chapter, I examine the role and consequence of state patronage and promotion in Thai classical dance, focussing on education as the instrument used by the state to preserve and impart classical dance to the new generations. The central focus of this chapter is the exploration of how classical dance was differently evaluated over the period when it was under the new educational system. I argue that the new system of dance training today is the main factor in the further development of dance drama, and alters forms of classical dance creativity. For the purpose of preservation under state monopoly, the neo-traditions of *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance dramas of the Fine Arts Department in the revivals of the 1940s have been passed on to new generations. As a result, the Fine Arts Department versions of *Khon* and *Lakhon* have become standardised, being taught and disseminated across dance institutes. I investigate the way in which the state established a particular version of the dance, which has been transmitted to new generations and how it claimed its power and influence over the folk dances of Thailand. The chapter will describe the evolution of the state-empowered form of dance that has become synonymous with classical dance, and the dissemination of this dance in curricula.

This chapter builds on the idea that traditional dance was dependent on the formation role of state and cultural policy of educational institutions. Shannon Jackson (2004) examines ways of placing the performance studies and its theory under the context of the institutional history of performance in the US Academy. She explores how performance was placed in the institute and the role of the arts and humanities in higher education. Jackson analyses the relationship of institution and the change of theatre performance, noting that ‘theatre and performance further change their gendered, race, sexed, and classed associations depending upon the disciplinary, interdisciplinary, regional, and university context’ (2004:38-39). In this chapter, I find exactly this debate paralleled in the Thai educational system, especially in the history of dance study.

A similar point is made by Benjamin Brinner (1995) in his study of Javanese Gamelan musicians in *Knowing Music Making Music: Javanese Gamelan and the Theory of Musical Competence and Interaction*. Brinner mainly investigates the development of multiple musical capabilities and transforms through time. Pertinent to this study is his consideration about education related to the State:

The role of educational institutions in the formation and alteration of competence in twentieth-century Java deserves far lengthier discussion [. . .] The experiences of the many non-Indonesians who have turned to the study of Javanese music have likewise been shaped by educational and political agendas and institutions that are probably completely invisible for many of the participants (Brinner, 1995:10).

This is echoed in my discussion in this chapter about the shifts of Thai dance pedagogy under the impact of state policy and the centralisation of dance education.

The evolution of dance education in Thailand is traced through two sections in this chapter. Firstly, I begin my discussion with the theoretical background of traditional dance training before the state monopoly in order to understand how the dance training has changed from the past to the present. In addition, the analysis of the essence of dance training will be discussed. In the second section, I note the evolution of dance training curriculum in the national conservatory from 1934, when it began, until the present. This section aims to clarify how the state's versions of dance drama and reconstructions of dance knowledge were maintained and transmitted to new generations, and how the role of the new educational system has inhibited the development of dance drama today. Finally, I explore the classical dance curriculum in higher education as the key means through which knowledge of dance has been developed in academic perspectives. I argue that the educational system, as the new form of patronage, is the main factor in preserving, changing and developing classical dance in the modern era.

The Essence of Thai Traditional Dance Training

Before analysing how dance training has shifted after it was incorporated into the educational system, we must consider the essential theoretical background of Thai traditional dance practice. This theoretical background provides the necessary foundation for understanding the essential features of Thai dance training and how has changed from the past to the present. In this section, I investigate the formal traditional dance training by dividing it into three components: training in form, embodiment of character and creativity. These three steps comprised a general training for all kinds of traditional dance; a process of embodiment that Phillip Zarrilli calls ‘becoming a character’ (2000). This study by Zarrilli considers *Kathakali*, an Indian dance, and helps to comprehend the overview process of dance training, and how the actor embodies the character, which is similar to traditional Thai dance practice. However, I argue that this traditional dance training has gradually been changed in the new educational system. Some of these core components are maintained whilst others have been changed. Therefore, this chapter begins with the discussion of what the complications are in these components, before examining the structural change under patronage of education system, in the subsequent section.

To deeply understand the traditional training and how it has changed, this section is analysed by using historical sources from the Fine Arts Department and other primary sources from dance teachers. As discussed in Chapter Two, most history about traditional dance was greatly reconstructed by the Fine Arts Department after the period of the 1940s, including dance training. The book *The Primary Course of Training in Thai Theatrical Art* by Dhanit Yupho, published in 1969 in both Thai and English, was the first literary source recorded about the dance practice in general. However, the book outlined only the basics of dance training without analysing the whole process of traditional practice. I complement Yupho’s analysis by using other primary sources, such as the cremation

volumes of royal dancers and the record of the seminar about Thai dance during the 1970s, when the royal dancer was alive, and an interview with the senior dancer who was trained in dance at the turn of 1930s amid the shift of court training and new educational system.

Thai Classical Dance Training

Training in Thai classical dance, like other classical dance training, requires long-term practice. Dancers train from a very young age, normally beginning at the age of eight or ten. Yupho (1973:159) suggests that the young student who begins training at a very young age will be able to dance more beautifully than those who began training at the age of fifteen or sixteen, because the young student's body is still relatively flexible. Young dancers in particular need several years of training in order to become skilled dancers. As Zarrilli (2000:66) argues, 'It takes a ' life time' to reach a level where one's technique has become second nature, and where one's artistry in playing important roles is recognized as one's own and is appreciated as such'. In Thai classical dance, to become a good dancer, the long-term process of reshaping a body for perfecting the basic techniques of dance, and playing different characters in the dance repertory, are deemed necessary. This process of long-term training can be summarised as three-fold: training in the form, embodiment into the character, and creativity and choreography.

1. Training in the Form

The first step is the most important in which young dancers are trained to absorb the basic forms of dance movement, in a manner that is similar to other forms of traditional dance training. Generally, this formal process takes many years of training by repeating the elemental movements until the trainees are familiar with the gestures. In Thai dance, the perfect posture emphasises an elegant and graceful movement in which the upper torso and shoulder are kept straight, the arms and hands kept curved, knees bent and toes curved upward. The basic dance movement is a combination of three basic hand gestures called

Tangwong, *Chip*, and *Lowkaew*. These gestures are made at different levels and in different directions to compose the various gestures. In Thai dance practice, to absorb these basic movements, the novice dancer starts training with preliminary dances called *Phleng Cha* (slow tempo) and *Phleng Reo* (fast tempo). These two pure dance pieces, without lyrics, have formed an essential part of the traditional training for royal dancers from Ayuthaya period and continue to be passed down to the present day (Yamakup, 1983:77).

The *Phleng Cha* (slow tempo) is a lengthy dance piece taught during the young student's first year of training. It contains all the basics of dance technique, including footsteps, hand gestures and body movements. The purpose of this dance is to help the student learn the basic rhythmic patterns at normal speed. The *Phleng Reo* is a sequence of pure dance traditionally taught during the first year of training after learning the *Phleng Cha*. The *Phleng Reo* is technically more difficult than *Phleng Cha*, especially because it combines more complex use of hand gestures and foot movement; for example, the technique of *Lukkho* is the synchronised movement of the head and the waist in which the head tilts in one direction and the waist presses in the opposite one.

It is interesting to note that in the past there were various versions of slow and fast tempo training in different dance troupes which depended on the dance master's lineage. According to *The Cremation Volume of Lamoon Yamakup* (1983:77), the renowned dance master, after the reign of King Rama IV (1851-1868) when court dance was disseminated as training in several noble households, *Phleng Cha* and *Phleng Reo* were expanded into many versions. However, the version in which students are being trained today was standardised by the Fine Arts Department when it was officially taught in the School of Dramatic Arts in 1934. This version was formalised by two dance masters: Khru Lamoon from the Suankularb Palace and Khru Toun from the Banmoe Palace. Khru Lamoon standardised the version of male character which she was handed down from Phraya

Natthakanurak, the prominent dance master from the Royal Entertainment mentioned in the previous chapter, while the version of female character was formalised by Khru Toun, renowned dancer from Chao Phraya Thewet's dance troupe (The Cremation Volume of Lamoon, 1983:78). This is why the versions of *Phleng Cha* and *Phleng Reo* for male and female characters are rather different in the ordering of gestures and movements.

After the young dancer perfected the foundation of dancing with basic gestures and movements, the next step of the initial training involved training the primary *Naphat* dance pieces. The *Naphat* dance pieces were pieces of set choreography used for depicting emotion in dance drama, and were accompanied only by instrumental music.

In the initial training of the primary level for *Naphat*, dances such as *Chet* and *Sa-me* were taught to young dancers in order to prepare them to perform on stage a minor role such as the lady-in-waiting. *Chet* and *Sa-me* were aspects of a primary form of the *Naphat* which was generally used for characters of lower-statuses in dance drama; the *Chet* piece was used for travel over greater distances while *Sa-me* was used for movement over short distances. As discussed in Chapter Three, there are many levels of *Naphat* repertoire which are linked to the status of the character in dance drama and the *Wai Khru* ceremony. Before training for the higher level of *Naphat*, the young dancer had to receive the right to train by attending the ritual of 'being covered' in the *Wai Khru* ceremony. Traditionally, the higher levels of the *Naphat* dance were not normally taught to all students but only to those selected to perform in this role by virtue of being highly skilled. This level of *Naphat* dance was normally represented by the main character, so when the teacher handed down this particular role, the more sophisticated training levels of the *Naphat* were taught as a part of that character. In my interview with Suwanee Chalanukhro, an eighty-nine year old dance master, she explained from her own experience of training in the early 1930s:

I first started training in dance at the Royal dance of Phrapokrew since I was 6 years old. At that time, I was the youngest student that the teacher taught on a one-to-one basis. My first teacher was Khru Wilai Singhapan and my second teacher was Khru Jad. I was trained there until the revolution of 1932, when the royal *Khon* and *Lakhon* underwent other changes. When Luang Wichit set up the School of Dance and Music in 1934, I was transferred to study there when I was eight years old.

I was trained *Phleng Cha* and *Phleng Reo*, *Chet*, *Sa-me*, *Maibot* and *Rabam*. I had also trained the primary *Naphat* such as *Tranimit*, *Trabongkan*, but *Kukphat*, *Ruwsamla*, *Bathsakunee* (the high level of *Naphat*), I did not know, never trained. They were not in the curriculum. I just knew them when I grew up and trained in the main characters.

(Chalanukhro, interview, 2015) translated by author

The other dances for training are short dance pieces called *Rabam*. *Rabam* or group dances are sets of short dance pieces containing the verses of the dramatic text linked with some part of the main performance. This process of training aims to train the young dancer to become familiar with dance movements and the text, which is accompanied by the singer. The dancers learn not only to move in accordance with the meaning of the text, but also interact with other dancers especially when women and men dance together and then they also learn to develop skills to follow dance patterns to avoid incongruence; for example, the eye contact between male and female characters and their synchronised dance movements, or when dancers change the line of movement, the need to keep the relationship with the others dancers. Traditionally, the most important piece for training is *Rabam Sii Bot* or *Rabam Yai* (The Great Dance), which is comprised of four types of songs: *Phra thong*, *Bao-lut*, *Sra-burong* and *Pva-lim*. These songs are composed to integrate dance and songs. They narrate four different lyrics, with the similar theme of courtship among male and female *devas* (traditional Thai angels). Some these pieces are adapted in the short piece of dance performed in the dramatic play of *Khon* and *Lakhon*;

for example, angels dance in the first scene in an episode of *Narai Prab Nothok*. Interestingly, there was some change in this training in the new educational system in which *Rabam Sii Bot* was taught on a higher level instead of intermediate. This brought about a lack of foundation of dance skill for the students during that time of change; however, this change was retained only briefly, and has been reinstated in the new curriculum since. To understand this situation, I will discuss in depth this change of dance training and the factors impacting it, in the following section.

This initial stage of training is an important process for beginners to fully embody the basic dance gestures and movements. To perfectly embody the dance technique and movement, the daily repetition of basic exercises and intense practice are necessary. In the past, the young court dancers, once accepted by the head teacher of court dance, would reside in the royal household and train in dance for a whole day. Khru Chaleay Sukawanit, a dance master who started training dance at the age of seven at the Suankularb Palace during 1911-1923, and later become the one of the main teachers who operated the dance training in the Dramatic Arts College, described her own experience on all the basic elements of dance training:

5.00-7.00 the first section began with two hour long practice in *Phleng Cha* and *Phleng Reo* (the slow and fast tempo), the basic of dance pieces. Later, the dance training was separated between the male and female characters. The male character was trained in 'Ten-Sua', while female character trained in 'Chet Ching' dance piece. In order to allow the dancers to know the basis of *Khon*, the male character trained in the demon character in the piece of *Kraonai* and the female character trained in the monkey character. These sections were practiced until 7.00 and at 9.00 the dancers have a literature class, focusing on reading and writing which purposed to have ability to read and remember the dramatic text. From 13.00-16.00, this session was used for rehearsing stories. 16.00, there was a break for rest. The final session started at 20.00-24.00 to practice the special role and

rehearsing the stories. (in the seminar 'Thai Dance' at Saranitet room, Chulalongkorn University on 27 November, 1995:1-2) translated by author

Interestingly, from the schedule of a royal dancer's training above, the most important process of training in the form was the daily exercise which helped the dancer to have a strong foundation before training at higher levels. Traditionally, to reshape a body for perfecting dance postures, dancers had to train by repeating the basic movements over and over each day until they had absorbed those forms and used them instinctively. This was generally the most important process of primary step in traditional dance training in South Asia. Zarralli's analysis of 'body control exercises' in Kathakali (2011:249) notes that 'the first step in preparing, perfecting or gaining complete knowledge of the body is by repetition of the basic exercise and forms that constitute a specific mode of embodiment'. In Thai dance, the perfect body is judged by how well the curve of arms and hands move properly in proportion with the whole body. Traditionally, to embody the perfect posture, dancer was trained by practicing Slow and Fast Tempo every morning to absorb the forms of dance, and then practiced *Ten-Sua*⁶⁴ for male characters and *Chet Ching*⁶⁵ for female characters to help the dancer to strengthen their legs and maintain energy to control their balance of movement. However, this process of daily repetition of basic movement was not included in the new educational system because of limited time in class. The new system tends to differ from the old by including training in several

⁶⁴ *Ten-Sua* (stepping at the pole) is the fundamental process of training for *Khon* in which dancer raises the hand about face level touching the pole and then begins stamping the floor at the rhythm 'one-two-three'. The other rhythm called '*Ta-Leuk-Teuk*' which means the way of trampling the floor left-right-left alternately, then, freezing the forelegs lowering one-self by bending the knee. This practice helps the dancer to have a perfect angular of leg posture

⁶⁵ *Chet-Ching* is one of the *Naphat* repertoire for moving in further distance in which the music mainly emphasised the rhythm of the *Ching*, the small metal percussive instrument used for keeping the rhythm steady in the Thai ensemble. The specific movement in this dance is the footstep of '*Kradok thao*' (bending one leg back and upward), moving up and down with knee bent accompany with the rhythm of *Ching*. This practice helps dancer to have strengthened legs with their movement.

dance pieces along with many subjects instead of repeating the basic pieces mentioned above. I will discuss this shift and the factors of change in depth in the next section.

2. The Embodiment of the Character

The advanced level of dance training involves the dancer's embodiment into the character. In other words, it is the process of training the dancer to play the role and become the character which is an important stage to demonstrate the skill of the dancer. In Thai traditional training, the dancer trains by learning some of the roles in the dance drama repertoire, which aim to develop the dancer's skill in applying the basics of dance movement to express a character state. The expression of emotion in dance is created by combining the basic alphabet of dance with dramatic text. The codification of hand gestures to express emotion can be divided into four types: to convey feelings such as 'happiness' or 'sadness', to portray nature such as 'sunshine' or 'rain', to convey action such as 'to go' or 'to see', and to express more abstract ideas such as 'beauty' or 'grandeur' (Virulrak, 1986:18).

The advance training of the embodiment in the character is different from the training in the form because the dancers not only follow the codified patterns, but they also empower and enrich movement by integrating their feelings together with the gesture to enhance the characterisation. The gesture of sorrow; for example, means the dancer has to present the depth of sadness of the character by reflecting it in body language of crying in dance movement. The quality of this movement is shown by how the dancer leans down from the waist and puts her left hand to her forehead, as if she were sobbing. To embody the emotion completely, the dancer needs to perform the movement slowly and gracefully, smooth in the beginning and sharp at the end. Zarralli (2011:248) called this process of movement a 'psychophysical approach' which means the process of 'the inner and outer dimensions of embodied experience'. From my own experience of dancing, this process

of verbal movement and its technique is difficult to teach students, but they absorb these gestures through their own experience of observing teachers or senior dancers, or when they learn many roles and have many experiences of performing on the stage.

However, it is interesting to note that in Thai culture of dance training, the creative choreography of the role is granted only to the dance master through choreography rather than to the dancer herself. The young dancer has to exactly replicate the dance passed on from the senior teacher. This process of the teacher-student lineage is similar to other forms of traditional dance training in South Asia; for example, Kathakali dancers were also traditionally taught through the teacher system (Zarrilli, 2000: 68). In traditional Thai dance, to perform dance drama, the special dance training was reserved only for the student who demonstrated the best skill and was chosen to play the particular role. When the new production of *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance dramas were restaged and rehearsed, the teachers who were well-known for that specific role were invited to teach the techniques and skills to the selected student. The student received the special training and learned how to interpret the role called *Ti-bot* from the teacher. This teaching system remains an ideal today, even for the professional artist and in the modern educational system. In my interview with Phantoorak (2015), a dance artist in the Fine Arts Department, she explained to me that in every production of the Fine Arts Department, the senior teacher is still invited to direct the dance movement even though the dancer may be experienced in performing in that character. Moreover, when the Fine Arts Department undertook the project of restaging ancient dance drama, senior dance teachers who were experienced in performing in that production even if they had never performed as the main character, were invited to be advisors on the project.



Figure 4.1. Teacher-student practice in the rehearsal of *Khon* at the Office of Performing Arts on 8 April 2016. Photograph by the researcher.

In terms of dance pedagogy, several scholars of Thai dance have argued that this teacher-student system is perhaps a cause of slow development in dance creativity. Rutnin (1982:16) claimed that this hierarchical traditional method of training system has both positive and negative effects. A positive effect is that it is the best way to preserve and ensure the survival of traditional dance without much distortion. On the other hand, it obstructs individual creativity and freedom of expression, which is different from western methods that encourage individual interpretation from directors, actors and dancers alike. Virulrak (1986:19) also criticises the way in which the teacher system has brought about the slow growth of court dance style. However, it is my contention that the teacher method could be effective, depending on how it is taught and on the experience of the teacher. Suwanee Chalanukhro (2015), the senior dance teacher who was recognised as a National Artist in 1990, explained to me in an interview that from her own experience of training for a major role, her teacher did not teach her through merely requiring imitations of a particular dance movement, but instead provided her with a repertoire of dance gestures that she could choose from to interpret the dramatic text. She explained by comparing

two famous teachers who came from the same royal dance troupe but had different styles of dance teaching: one was Khunying Phaew or Mom Arjarn who taught at the Division of Dance and Music, another one was Khru Lamoon who taught at the College of Dramatic Arts.

Yes, for example, when I did this, I was told, 'Change. Do like this.' Talking about teachers, I want to talk about Mom Arjarn, when performing '*Laden Monthee Rueang See*', for twenty times it was different each time. But with Khru Lamoon, each time it was the same. Mom Arjarn changed so often that I got dizzy. I asked, 'Which movement?' and I was told, 'Idiot! I gave you twenty movements and then you just change them to become acquainted and well-experienced.' Khru Lamoon and Mom Arjarn taught in a different manner. Mom Arjarn taught differently to a curriculum. Khru Lamoon taught according to the curriculum. So, it was the same each time. But with Mom Arjarn there were a variety of movements. Mom Arjarn said to me 'Idiot! There are twenty movements and you can't remember them all. Just think which one you want to master'

(Charanukro, interview, 2015) translated by author

Even though the dance movement was passed down from generation to generation through the teacher lineages, each of those lineages is identified with a specific mode of dance movement. In Thai, the term *Thaang* refers to the lines of dancers which specifically highlights dance differences. The variations of the dance versions are normally associated with the individual teacher or the royal household where they trained. For example, *Supalak Um Som*, the ancient court dance performed in *Unarut* episode and taught today descends from the line of Khru Chaleay Sukawanit from Suankularb palace. In this piece from *Supalak Um Som*, Khru Chaleay was taught by Momkhru Eung Hsitasen, Momkhru Yam and Mom Khru Num Nawarat N Ayutthaya, royal dancers in the reign of King Rama II (101 Anniversary of Lakhon Wang Suankularb, 2012: 125). However, it is interesting to note that the educational system is the main factor in

preserving only a specific line of dance even though there were many variations among the different lineages. For instance, '*Chet Ching*'—one of the higher levels of *Naphat*—has two lineages of transmission; one is from Khru Chaleay in Suankularb Palace, and the other one from Khru Tuan in Banmoh Palace. As Khru Chaleay was the main dance teacher in the College of Dramatic Arts, the dance version of her lineage has been mainly taught in today lesson, while the version of Khru Toun was rarely practised (Charanukro, interview, 2015).

3. Creativity and Choreography

In terms of dance creativity, I argue that the form of dance drama was actually developed through time before it was codified as a genre by the state and maintained in the new educational system. From the historical evidence, modernised of Thai dance drama was led by the Thai monarch of the past. Runin (1986:4) points out that in each past period, the leaders or aristocrats who patronised the royal dance drama attempted to experiment with new ideas and concepts to present *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance drama in more effective and more attractive ways that were pleasing and for the audiences' entertainment. For example, the two modernised dance dramas from the late eighteenth century to early nineteenth century, *Lakhon Phanthang* and *Lakhon Dukdumban*, were the result of hybridisation of dance theatre. *Lakhon Panthang*, a popular dance drama, was created by an aristocrat named Chao Phraya Mahintharasakthamrong (Smith, 2005: 50). The play used legends of different ethnic groups as literary sources indicating its diverse sources of stories, characters, dances and musical tunes. The dancing style and presentation generally were those of the popular theatre. Dance styles were adopted which were suggestive of various ethnic groups. The other innovation was *Lakhon Dukdamban*, the dance drama genre adapted from a western style concert popular during the period 1899-1909 (Witayasakapan: 1992:35). When aristocrats attended an opera during a trip to Europe, they had the idea of expanding a Thai 'concert' into a Thai 'opera'. New play

scripts were written and were divided into scenes and acts instead of continuous verse as before. The plot was tightened by cutting out descriptive verses, especially those elaborating upon the actions and sentiments of the characters. Descriptive verses were for the most part limited to ‘conversation’ between actors either in the form of singing or rhyme dialogues. The Pi Phat ensemble was modified to use softer versions in instruments that could be played indoors. Today, these two dance genres have been preserved and maintained through performance at the National Theatre, and are taught in all dance institutes.

It is interesting to note that the process of dance creativity in the past was profoundly related to the adaptation of dramatic text rather than focussing on the form of dance genres. For entertainment purposes, the dramatic text was changed and developed to serve the new audience and applied to suit the taste of directors, as mentioned earlier about *Lakhon Phanthang* and *Lakhon Dukkamban*. When the new production was produced, the dramatic texts were sometimes adapted from the ancient literature or newly composed by the elite or aristocrats. The process of dance creativity was generally *Ti-bot*, in which the dancer interpreted the characters by applying codified gesture to express the dramatic text. This is different from today’s way of producing the dance drama. After the dance genres were reconstructed in the 1940s and the policy of preserving the ancient dance style was established, most of the new productions concentrated on the form of dance genres rather than on presenting the story. I argue that the change of dance creativity today was the result of dance training in the new educational system which I will discuss in the following section.

The Power of State Influence in Dance Pedagogy

This section focusses on how dance training shifted and a new standard was established to preserve and transmit traditional dance to younger generations, and how the

educational system changed and has subsequently affected dance today. As a result of socio-political change in Thai society after the revolution of 1932, the educational system has become the new patron of classical dance instead of the royal family or aristocrats. As I discussed in Chapter One, the beginning of state involvement in dance drama teaching can be traced back to when the State established the School of Dance and Music in 1934. The royal dancers from different dance troupes or royal households were invited to teach in this national dance school. Consequently, the diversity of dance training and distinctive dance styles disappeared and the dances were centralised in the Fine Arts Department and the School of Dance and Music. Due to government support, traditional dance training has been gradually formalised and standardised in the new pedagogical system; as a result, the reinvention of dance training by the State has gradually become a new tradition. With this formalisation of dance practice, I argue that the new educational system is responsible for the inhibition of further development of traditional dance, since it is preserved as a ‘thing’ not a ‘living art’, while, simultaneously, education system is the main factor in developing and changing traditional dance in modern times.

From the revolution of 1932 to the present, there have been many changes in cultural and educational policy related to socio-political change in Thailand. It is undeniable that those factors of change have impacted on dance curricula where classical dance is subsidised by the government. Traditional dance training gradually shifted following the policy which needed to be adapted to suit the dynamic of social change. In order to understand the evolution of traditional dance training under the new educational system from 1932 to the present, I will synthesise the development of dance curricula with the cultural policy and social change, focusing on the reformation of dance knowledge and practice. This section is divided into four chronological periods denoting the important moments that impact on dance training: the initial period of dance training in the new educational system 1932-1945; the revival and promotion of Thai dance training 1945-1960s; the

standardisation and dissemination of dance training 1970s-1995; and traditional dance training in modern time from 1995 to the present.

The Initial Period of Dance Training in The new Educational System: 1932-1945

In Chapter One, I noted that the 1930s marked the beginning of a period during which court dance became patronized by the state after the revolution of 1932. In 1934, the state established the School of Dance and Music to train students in traditional dance. It could be said that this period oversaw the most radical changes in Thai dance training by establishing the state school system. The students had to train in both general subjects and dance practice as well as perform for the Fine Arts Department (So.Tho.0701.31/19:34⁶⁶). During the first stage of the establishment of the Academy of Dance and Music, there were many political problems due to the Members of Parliament who were against the setting up of this school because, at that time, in the new state sanctioned account of Thai belief, the status of dancer was disdained. Therefore, the dance school functioned with the purpose of training the student to be a dance teacher instead of a dance performer. As a result of feudalism in Thai society, the statuses of dancers and teachers were different. In the past, a dancer was generally regarded as a citizen of lower status because most of them were uneducated, with the exception of the royal dancers, whereas the teacher was highly respected because they were regarded as knowledgeable. Consequently, when the royal dance was patronised by School of Dance and Music, to encourage people to be interested in training in dance, the school had to focus on producing teachers. This was evident in the records of the curriculum of the Silapakorn School.

In the division of Dance and Music should train the student to be a teacher not a performer because if the program aimed to be that, no one would study here. At the moment, there

⁶⁶ So.Tho.0701.31/19 An Annual Report of Silapakorn School ,1937-1939.(รายงานของโรงเรียนศิลปากร ,2480-2482)

are many students interested in studying in this program of dance and music, because they hope to be a teacher, teaching singing, music and dance in public schools or at least having a chance to work as an official at the Fine Arts Department. (So.Tho.0701.31/19:76⁶⁷) translated by author

As the Dance School was mainly managed by the Fine Arts Department, the traditional dance training was undeniably changed owing to state policy. According to the official aims of the Academy of Dance and Music in the lists below, it can be clearly seen that the purpose of the school was not only to elevate the status of dance students but also modernise the performing arts rather than preserve the traditional arts. In the dance curriculum, the student had to study the general subjects more than dance lessons; for example, in the six-hour study day, the student was required to study the general subjects for four hours, with only two hours for dance training (The Fine Arts Department, 2003:114). The school's programme mainly followed the general curriculum from the Ministry of Education, but placed some emphasis on learning neighbouring countries' languages such as Cambodian, Burmese, Mon, Vietnamese and Melayu. In addition, lessons on Thai and international customs and traditions and western music, as well as speech techniques also formed part of the curriculum (So.Tho.0707.31/2:64⁶⁸). Moreover, as I discussed in Chapter One, Luang Wichit Wathakan, the General-Director of the Fine Arts Department at that time, attempted to modernise Thai theatre and instil patriotism in Thai society. Therefore, the productions of the Fine Arts Department were not intended to display a traditional court dance style, but instead highlighted elements of patriotism in performance. Thai classical dance was adapted and simplified and combined with western elements into the spoken drama instead of dance drama style. The purpose of The Academy of Dance and Music was prescribed as follows:

⁶⁷ So.Tho.0701.31/19:76⁶⁷, Memorandum in the curriculum of the Sinlapakorn School

⁶⁸ So.tho.0701.31/2:64 the Principle of the Academy of Dance and Music (ระเบียบการของโรงเรียนนาฏดุริยางคศาสตร์)

1. To uphold the national arts of Drama and Music, and adapt traditional dramatic production in conformity with the modern tastes and objectives
2. To educate artists and musicians so that the dramatic arts could be used to help improve the education and morality of the people and;
3. To help drama and music artists to carry out their professions with the same honour and respectability as in other countries, and to prevent a recurrence of the old days when artistic professions were looked down upon and detested (So.Tho.0701.31/4⁶⁹)

In terms of dance pedagogy, traditional dance practice was formalised and westernised under the new educational system. As the evidence of dance curriculum in 1937 below indicates, the structure of a dance session was officially divided into two main sections; theory and practice. It is interesting to note that within this new educational system, dance practice was more formal in that the dance student not only studied in the dance practice but also learned the history and the principles of dance, which had never been taught and standardised in the past. Moreover, with regards to the purpose of modernising the performing arts in this period, the student also had to train in acting in the western style to perform on the stage of the Fine Arts Department, as illustrated in the dance curriculum in 1937:

Academic essence:

1. History of classical Thai dance
2. The criteria for song selections that suit the dance
3. The principle of costumes for the character

Practice core

1. Perform 'Slow and Fast Tempo' for both female and male characters, or perform dance for demon and monkey characters

⁶⁹ So.Tho.0701.31/4⁶⁹, The Establishment of Sinlapalkorn School, 1934-1939

2. Perform 'Maibot Yai' (The alphabet of dance movement) completely
3. Perform a role according to the examiners' instruction // Perform a character from the dramatic text
4. Perform a role in a spoken drama according to the examiners' instruction

(So. Tho.0701.31/19:88⁷⁰)

This period after the revolution in 1932 marked the greatest turning point in the development and standardisation of dance training. Because of the radical change in Thai society from tradition to modernity, education was used as a tool to teach new generations to be civilised. In formal education, traditional dance and its practice needed to be adapted in which knowledge of dance and dance training was theorised and standardised to teach in class. Traditionally, dance was passed down through the lineage of the dance teacher, and the knowledge of dance was transmitted orally from one generation to the next.

It is undeniable that traditional dance practice had to be changed and developed following the new system. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the purpose of the dance curriculum emphasised the production of dance teachers instead of dancers, hence the program had to be formed by focussing on knowledge which was useful for teachers. Besides training in the traditional dance, the student needed to learn languages, general knowledge, western drama and dance theory in order to enhance their ability. This formalised dance education initially changed the traditional dance practice and the status of dance in Thai society.

The New Standard of Dance Training

In terms of dance practice in the School of Dance and Music, it is interesting to note that the fundamental training was not only taught as traditional practice but also had more

⁷⁰ So. Tho.0701.31/19:88, the curriculum of dance and music in 1937

innovative dance practice. In traditional training, the process in the form of basic dance movement mainly used *Phleng Cha* and *Phleng Reo* (slow and fast tempo), Primary *Naphat*, and '*Rabam Sii Bot*' respectively. In the new educational system, *Maibot Yai* or the alphabet of dance movement was re-created as a new standard of dance training and this continues to be practiced in today's dance lessons. In 1934, *Maibot Yai* was recomposed by Lamoon Yamakup, the renowned dance masters from Suankularb Palace, as a part of *Suriyakup*, the dance production of the Fine Arts Department directed by Luang Wichit. This dance movement drew inspiration from *Tamra Fon Ram*, the text for training the dancers that described all the basics of dance movement. The first text *Tamra Fon Ram* was originally illustrated as static postures in colour and gold painting during the reign of King Rama I, as a royal command to reconstruct the court dance and set a standard for classical dance (Rutnin, 1993:171). In 1923, following the royal command of King Rama VI to publish a standard training text, *Tamra Fon Ram* was rewritten and edited by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab. This new edition was divided into three parts: the legend of dance translated from *Natyashastra* Indian dance, the text of Thai dance imitated from the original text by drawing, and the collection of photographs to demonstrate those basic dance movements (Rajanubhab, 1923)⁷¹. *Maibot Yai* dance comprises sixty-six dance gestures accompanied by their specific names. The names of these dance movements are related to the gestures of Gods or nature, for example, *Thep Phanom* (The salutation of the celestials), *Kwang Doen Dong* (The stag walking in the forest). Throughout a period of time, *Maibot Yai* has become the new foundation of dance training because of the transmission process and the great promotion in state publication. Since 1934, *Maibot Yai* was continually taught as a basic training movement in the form for primary level after students had trained in the slow and fast tempo. It has been retained

⁷¹ The new edition of '*Tamra Fon Ram*' was first published for giving to guests at the royal cremation of Somdet Phra Chao Nongya thoe Chaofa Chuthathuttharadilok Krom Khun Phetchabun Intrarachai in 1923.

in dance curricula since that time and is also reproduced in curricula across dance institutes. As a result, *Maibot Yai* gradually became a new standard of primary training which remains to this day.

As the establishment of the dance school came from government policy and was operated by the Fine Arts Department, the school had to make several changes which followed the Fine Arts Department's policy; for instance, it went through many name changes: from *Rongrian Nataduriyang-khasat* (Academy of Dance and Music) to *Rongrain Silapakhon* (Sinlapahon School), to *Rongrain Sang-khitsin* (Sang-khitsin School) in 1942. However, even though the national dance school demonstrated many changes in the organisations, the dance curriculum was still taught in the same way until the school closed down for two years because of the crisis of World War II in the mid-1940s.

The Revival and Promotion of Thai Dance Training: 1945-1960s

The period of the 1940s marked the most important turning point in the revival of classical dance and development of dance pedagogy. As I discussed in Chapter Two, during that period, the socio-political situation in Thailand returned to favour the hegemony of the Thai elite. In regard to the court dance drama, *Khon* and *Lakhon* were revived to represent the newly state constructed Thai identity. The Fine Arts Department initially operated a new project to reconstruct the classical dance including its history, performance and practice, which later became a new standard account of the dance tradition.



Figure 4.2 *Tamra Fon Ram*, Text of Dance Training. Top left: The example of the first *Tamra Fon Ram*, painted in colour and gold in the reign of King Rama I. Top right: The drawing text of dance training in the Reign of King Rama VI. Centre: The collection of dance photographs in the Reign of King Rama VI. Images courtesy of the Fine Arts Department.

As a part of the state project to promote the classical arts, The Office of Performing Arts was established to be responsible for this revival of classical dance, and there were two main sub-divisions: the Division of Dance for organising and producing the dance productions and the School of Dramatic Arts for training the students to perform in those productions. These two subdivisions shared a close relationship from the beginning of their establishment when all dance artists in the Office of Performing Arts taught in the School of Dramatic Arts and both students and teachers performed for the Fine Arts Department's productions (So.Tho.0701.9.1/11:68⁷²). However, these two subdivisions were separated in 1961 which further affected the development of dance training, which I will discuss in the following sections.

Remarkably, this period witnessed a great change in the function of Thai dance in which it became a part of Thai culture to promote Thai identity. The government promoted traditional dance by regularly having performances at the National Theatre, on the state special occasions of welcoming foreign guests, and as cultural events for tourists both in Thailand and abroad. As a result of the increasing demand of cultural performances for promotion, the student was not only trained for being a teacher, but also heavily practised performing on the stage of the Fine Arts Department. Some of the most skilled students would be selected to work as dance artists in the Office of Performing Arts. It can be said that this period saw a radical shift in the function of traditional dance in Thai modernity.

As discussed earlier regarding the socio-political and power change in Thai society and in the Fine Arts Department itself, the cultural policy and the purpose of the School also changed with new leadership. The policy was changed to preserve the traditional dance rather than adapting it to absorb western elements, as we saw in Chapter Two. In order to understand how dance training changed, we need to explore the different meanings of

⁷² So.Tho.0701.9.1/11:68 The report of education and performance in the Division of Dance in 1948 (รายงานการศึกษาและการแสดงของแผนกนาฏศิลป์ ประจำปี พ.ศ. 2491)

the term ‘modernisation’ in dance productions in the two distinct periods of 1932-1942 and the period of revival from 1945. In the government of Luang Wichit Wathakan (1932-1942), the productions were modernised by the combination of two elements, Thai dance and western style of spoken drama, while in the period of Dhanit Yupho (1945-1967), he attempted to revive *Khon* and *Lakhon*, the ancient dance drama, but adapted and modernised the productions to suit the taste of a new generation of audiences; for example, technical elements, such as light and sound or impressive set scenes, were added to make the productions more interesting. In addition, the long dance pieces or dialogues were cut down to condense the productions to help maintain the audience’s attention. These different styles of productions resulted in the dance training no longer emphasising spoken productions in which the dancer was trained to act in a western style; in the revived dance drama, dancers were trained in the traditional practice of embodiment into the character. During this period, the full method of traditional dance training was revived in the mode that helped to preserve the tradition before it disappeared.

The purpose of the school was prescribed as:

1. To serve as a government institution for teaching the music and drama
2. To preserve and popularize the music and drama of Thai Nation
3. To make the musicians and actors in this country honourable as those in others’

(No.So.Tho.0701/328:1⁷³)

It is interesting to note that the reformation of the School of Dramatic Arts (Rongrain Natasin) in 1945 was significant in standardising dance pedagogy which later became the model of dance practice. In this period, the School pioneered many aspects of Thai dance

⁷³ No.So.Tho.0701/328:1 ‘Education : Worship of the Teachers and The Staging of Miscellaneous Plays at the School of Dramatic Arts of the Department of Fine Arts’

training; for instance, the first establishment of a formal *Khon* program, and the first revival of the *Wai Khru* ceremony. These were reinventions of traditional court dance and dance ritual which can still be observed in modern practice, as discussed in Chapters Two and Three. The educational system ensured that these reinvented traditions of *Khon* and *Wai Khru* ceremony were reconstructed and formalised to teach students in the class. This gradually changed the process of traditional transmission in which dancer used to learn one-to-one with the teacher and knowledge of dance was orally handed down. However, when these traditional courses were established in the curricula, all knowledges of dance were standardised and officially taught in the School of Dramatic Arts. It was the beginning of a new tradition in which these reinvented traditions by the state became the new standard of Thai dance and continually transmitted for generations through to the present day. In other words, education is the main factor in preserving and transforming traditional dance in the context of modernity.

The other shift in dance training in this period was the expansion of dance educational system in which it extended from the high school level to higher education. This curriculum mainly emphasised the teacher courses in which many courses about education were added on at higher levels, such as Psychology, the Principle of Education and Teaching as well as the Practice of Teaching in the school (So.Tho.0701.37/58:18⁷⁴). In this reformation of dance curriculum, the dance course was divided into three levels: a Preliminary Course extending over a period of six years and equivalent to middle school education, an Intermediate Course extending over a period of two years and equivalent to the preparatory course for university education, and an Advanced Course extending over a period of three years and equivalent to university education. The advance course opened

⁷⁴ So.Tho.0701.37/58: 18 The Ministry of Defence realised on the educational curriculum in all programs and the list of the students (เรื่องกระทรวงกลาโหมขอทราบหลักสูตรการศึกษาในสาขาวิชาต่างๆ และรายชื่อนักศึกษา).

in the education year of 1950. (No.So.Tho.0701/328:3⁷⁵). However, this model remained the same but has been developed with a slight difference in the year training at each level. It was the result in the increasing number of dance teachers in Thai society.

In terms of dance training, it was similar to the traditional training which the students had trained by daily repetition of basic dance movements and well-trained students were selected to take part in the theatrical performances. In the dance curriculum, the students studied the general subjects in the morning and practised dance throughout the afternoon (The Fine Arts Department, *Ngan Sang Khit Sin*, 1951: 1-2). Towards the middle of the educational year, when it was time to perform for the public, the students were taught through the real experience of rehearsal and performing on stage (No.So.Tho.0701/328:3). Although some students did not perform the main characters, they were able to learn by observing dance rehearsals. Nongyao Amrunpongwattana (2014), a dance student who used to perform, explained to me that even though she had the experience of performing just the minor characters, such as a lady-in-waiting or a soldier, she still can remember the whole dramatic text of the productions and even the dance movement sequence of the main character. This was because of rigorous rehearsals and repeated performances of the production throughout the year, as well as her personal interest. Moreover, Chalanukhro, who frequently performed the main characters, proudly explained to me that she fully embodied many dance skills because she spent many additional hours in training for the main character with different dance masters. In doing so, she was able to absorb several dance techniques and possessed the ability to adapt them to perform and teach to newer generations today.

There are many singing scenes. *'Dukdamban Inao'* contains *'Chom Dong'* singing scene.

And there are many *'Thaang'* (or branches/pathways/schools) such as Khun Ying Paitoon

⁷⁵ No.So.Tho.0701/328:1 'Education: Worship of the Teachers and the Staging of Miscellaneous Plays at the School of Dramatic Arts of the Department of Fine Arts'.

and Luang Pradit. Nowadays people adopt Luang Pradit in their plays. I performed according to Nathasin School for 20 years at Krom Sinlapakorn (the Fine Arts Department) and when I came to Chula (Chulalongkorn University), I changed to suit myself with Khun Ying Paitoon School. I tried to find her disciples and I found her last disciple and asked her to teach me. And then I adapt to teach my students here at Chula. (Chalanukhro, interview, 2015).

As the cultural policy to promote Thai arts, classical dance training was also used as a source to publicise and propagate Thai culture. Books about dance pedagogy were published in both Thai and English. The book entitled *Education: Worship of the Teachers and The Staging of Miscellaneous Plays at the School of Dramatic Arts of the Department of Fine Arts* was published in 1949. This book contains much general information about the School of Dramatic Arts and dance education such as The School's history and aims, the basic principle of education, the annual *Wai Khru* ceremony and some miscellaneous plays. This book was widely published in English to promote the School of Dramatic Arts. The other book titled *The Preliminary Course of Training in Thai Theatrical Arts*, was one of twenty-five books in the Thai Culture New Series firstly published in 1952 and was reprinted many times with different publishers. This book was published in both Thai and English versions to explain the method of primary dance practice which included photographs of the demonstration of *Maibot Yai*; the vocabulary of basic dance gestures and movements. This writing was tremendously influential in the field of dance pedagogy because it was the first official record of dance training and the most frequently cited. Remarkably, as discussed earlier with regards to the invented basic training of *Maibot Yai* in 1934, due to being greatly promoted and codified by the Fine Arts Department, *Maibot Yai* has become a new standard of primary training rather than *Rabam Sii Bot* which was the traditional one. Moreover, The School of Dance and Music was also opened to the public allowing tourists or ordinary Thai people to visit and

observe the traditional dance training, some of this involved foreign dancers visiting; for example, a member of Royal Ballet visited the School in May, 1961 as shown below.



Figure 4.3. Many foreigners visited the School of Dramatic Arts. left: Royal Ballet Troupe visited the School of Dramatic Arts, published in *Bangkok World* on 1 June, 1961 (Courtesy of the National Archive, So.Tho.0701.9.2/16). Bottom right: Miss Constances Couch, an American teacher in ballet being trained in Thai dance. Images courtesy of the Fine Arts Department, 1990:22.

It is worth noting that many of the newly created dance pieces of this period later became the new standard for dance training. As traditional dance was promoted for tourism, numerous short dance pieces were created to serve new audiences. Some of these dance pieces were a part of the main production of dance drama, and some of them were adapted and newly choreographed to perform abroad; for example, the famous dance piece called *Verachai Ling* (Monkey Warrior) was first created by Khru Kree Worasarin, the renowned *Khon* master, for promoting Thai culture in Myanmar in 1955. The dance depicts the inspection of the powerful monkey army before moving to the battle field (Yusawad, 2012:218). Today, this dance is very popular and regularly performed on the stage both in Thailand and other countries. Moreover, it has currently become one of the basic dance training routines for primary students for the monkey character. Traditionally, the monkey character student trained by repeating a basic series of movements, which has six patterns. However, after the dance piece *Verachai Ling* was created, it became a part of daily practice because it contained all those basic patterns.



Figure 4.4 *Verachai Ling* or Monkey Warrior Dance. Photo courtesy of the Fine Arts Department.

The other factor that impacted dance training was the separation of the Division of Dance and the School of Dramatic Arts. In 1961, as the result of the increasing number of dance students and a great number of events to perform, these two divisions had to separate in order for easier management (So.Tho.0701.9.1/14:15⁷⁶). This separation caused many changes in dance pedagogy. Firstly, the quality of the pedagogy decreased in that apprentice graduates were selected to teach in the School of Dance and Music instead of the highly skilled performing teachers. To be a professional dance teacher, one needed to have several years of intensive training and performing in order to be a good model for the student. In an interview with Tantranon, a senior dancer in the Division of Dance, she described that after the separation, most of the skillful dance students were chosen to work at the Division of Dance as performers, while general students worked as teachers and some of them had no experience in performing the main character. Tantranon claimed that this was the reason why the newer generations of dancers are not skilled enough:

The young generations were not skilful. When we moved and did not teach them, they was trained by unskilled teachers. So, the students were poorly trained in the early stage, did not have a good foundation. Some of them could perform only the role of the lady in waiting for their whole life. (Tantranon, interview, 2014)

Moreover, this separation caused fewer opportunities for the student to perform on stage, especially in the roles of the main characters in dance drama which was the most important step to enhance dance skills. Normally, there were two casts in every production of the Fine Arts Department, the mature teachers and students (Fahchamroon, 1996:232). When the graduated dance students performed for the Division of Dance post-separation, the students in the School did not have much of a chance to perform in main roles, and some of them just performed as minor characters.

⁷⁶ So.Tho.0701.9.1/14:15 the duties of all divisions in the Fine Arts Department (หน้าที่ของกองต่างๆ ในกรมศิลปากร)

The Standardisation and Dissemination of Dance Training: 1970s-1995

After the revival of classical dance, the heavy promotion from the state, traditional dance was rapidly disseminated throughout Thailand via the new educational system. The impact of state support on Thai dance resulted in a growing interest among the Thai people in Thai classical dance as evidenced by the increasing number of the student applying to study in the School of Dramatic Arts, where of the seven hundred or eight hundred applicants per year the school was able to admit only one-fourth of the pool (So.Tho.0701.37/97:3⁷⁷). During this period, classical dance training was not only taught in the School of Dramatic Arts in Bangkok but expanded to many regions, institutes and levels of education such as primary schools or secondary schools. Thus, the traditional dance and the knowledge developed by the Fine Arts Department were gradually incorporated in all curricula. This section examines the consequence of the expansion of Thai dance education throughout Thailand: the version promoted by the Fine Arts Department gradually become the standard of traditional dance. I argue that the educational system, especially the policy of disseminating classical dance to the regions of Thailand, was the main factor in spreading classical dance. The stagnation of dance curriculum from the 1970s to the mid-1990s inhibited the development of dance drama, and the reconstruction of dance in the revival period became the model of dance training and infiltrated dance curricula.

The Regional College of Dramatic Arts

The most significant dissemination of court dance style in the dance pedagogy came about when the School of Dramatic Arts was opened by the Regional Dance School all over Thailand in accordance with the governmental policy to develop the provincial parts of

⁷⁷ So.Tho.0701.37/97:3 The School of Dramatic Arts: its history and aims (โรงเรียนนาฏศิลป์ กรมศิลปากร ประวัติและความมุ่งหมาย)

Thailand (So.Tho.0701.9.1/17:49⁷⁸). Besides the court dance style, Thai dance also has different styles of folk dances which could be roughly categorised as emerging from four regions of Thailand: Central, North, Northeast, and South. In 1971, following the government policy of expansion of education in remote areas to preserve indigenous cultures, the Fine Arts Department set up a project to establish a Mobile Unit for cultural promotion within the region. As part of this project, the first regional school was opened in Chiangmai in the north of Thailand, because Chiangmai was the centre of Lanna Kingdom which had many ethnic cultures (20 years anniversary of Chiangmai College of Dramatic Arts, 1991:1-4). At the first stage of establishment of the Chiangmai School of Dramatic Arts, various critical opinions appeared in the newspapers concerning the readiness of the school; for example, the education building, teaching aid, and quality of the teachers as well as the influence of the local performing arts (So.tho.0701.37/88:2⁷⁹). In addition, it was noted by journalists that ‘Thailand was a developing country, it would be better to support students to study in other fields which were useful for the country’ (So.Tho.0701.37/89:4⁸⁰). Despite public criticism, the School opened on 1 June 1971 and later became the model for the establishment of other regional Schools of Dramatic Arts all over Thailand.

As a result of the School’s achievement and the policy to disseminate Thai culture, the School of Dramatic Arts was elevated from a School to a College on 1 January, 1972 (So.Tho.0701.37/91:6⁸¹). The regional dance Colleges were further expanded to the other main provinces in different regions such as Nakhorn Si Thammarat in the south (1978), Angthong (1979) and Sukothai (1979) in central Thailand, and Roi-et 1979 in the north-

⁷⁸ So.Tho.0701.9.1/17 The minutes of the committee of developing the north of Thailand, 11 October, 1962 (รายงานการประชุมคณะกรรมการภาคเหนือ วันที่ 11 ตุลาคม 2505 ณ ทำเนียบรัฐบาล ครั้งที่ 23)

⁷⁹ So.Tho.0701.37/88 Ram Ramet, in the column ‘Suksa Tudsana’ in *Daily News*, 18 January 1971

⁸⁰ So.Tho.0701.37/89 Sujit Wongtech, in the column ‘Arai koi Dai’ in the *Siamrat*, 26 January 1971

⁸¹ So.Tho.0701.37/91:6 the announcement of Ministry of Education regarding the elevation of the School of Dramatic Arts to the College of Dramatic Arts. (ประกาศกระทรวงศึกษาธิการ เรื่อง ยกฐานะโรงเรียนนาฏศิลป์ เป็นวิทยาลัยนาฏศิลป์)

east. Moreover, with the awakening of cultural promotion in the government of Prime Minister General Prem Tinsulanonda, the announcement regarding the national cultural policy was issued on 23 November 1981. This cultural policy had five main aims to promote and preserve cultural arts, which are summarised below:

1. Support the preservation of the Thai culture in all aspects through education, research, animation and development in order that culture may serve as an important tool for solving problems encountered in the conduct of individual life, for the development of social, economic and political progress, and for the strengthening of the national sovereignty.
2. Disseminate the Thai culture to the Thai people at large enabling them to understand and realize the values of their own culture and to translate these values into action. This knowledge and appreciation of Thai culture should lead to the national unity, security, and mutual understanding among the people in the nation as well as among those of the world.
3. Promote traditional local and ethnic culture in order to inculcate the appreciation of traditional and regional culture and at the same time stimulate adoption and harmonization of this diversity into a peaceful unity.
4. Support and promote cultural exchange at regional and international levels with the aim of creating international understanding and facilitating selective modification and absorption of exogenous cultures into the main stream of Thai culture and cultural solidarity.
5. Support and promote coordination and cooperation among the government agencies and private sectors engaged in cultural activities. All measures and devices shall be undertaken to mobilize national resources for the preservation, promotion and development of culture.

(Office of the National Culture Commission,1993:45-53)

Following this official announcement, the Fine Arts Department had to follow the policy and develop the standard of art education. One of the main purposes was to expand the regional school across Thailand and increase the standard of dance training at the bachelor degree level, in which the emphasis was to produce quality pedagogy, dance artists and artistic personnel, responding to the demand of each region and the whole country (Fahchumroon, 1996: 197). Since the government extended its support, the schools were continually opened in many provinces such as Kalasin in 1982, Lopburi in 1983, Janthaburi in 1984, Pathalung in 1984, Supanburi in 1993, and Nakhonrachasima in 1994, which made thirteen branches overall (Fahchumroon, 1996:195).

It is interesting to note that although these regional dance colleges use the same curriculum of the central dance school in Bangkok, each further specialises in folk dance specific to its area. Although the regional dance school aimed to preserve folk dance by inviting the local dancers to teach students in folk dance classes, the main training was still in the classical court dance from the Fine Arts Department. All the regional schools used the core curriculum from the College of Dramatic Arts and were taught by teachers who graduated from Bangkok, consequently the folk dance form began to gain central Thai court influences and gradually changed local aesthetics. This was evident in the many innovative dance pieces which possessed the hybrid form of folk and classical dance; for example, *Fon Leb* (Nail Dance), the folk dance in the north of Thailand created by Khru Lamoon, the renowned court dance master, carried on the Alphabet of Dance in *Maibot Yai*, combined with the slow movement characteristic of the northern dance style. This is related to Virulrak's criticism of the deterioration of folk dance which argues that 'because the dance teachers who have strong background in court dance are the ones teaching in this region [. . .] northern and north-eastern dance are gradually influenced by the court elements which would eventually lead to their disappearance' (Virulrak, 1986:19). It could be said that after the establishment of the regional dance college, folk

dance was greatly influenced by—and began to showcase elements of—court dance performance, particularly the graceful and elaborate movements characteristic of the latter. This evidence can be clearly seen in many creations of folk dance performances today.

The Cooperation of College of Dramatic Arts with Rajamangala Institute of Technology in Relation to Dance Teachers

Beginning in the 1960s, and accelerating greatly in the 1970s, the state began promoting dance in school curricula which meant that there was a shortage of dance teachers. In 1960, Arts education was made compulsory, and each school student was required to study art, music and dancing (Sophon, 1990:169-170). In order to meet the demand for Thai dance teachers in primary and secondary schools in 1975, the College of Dramatic Arts cooperated with the Rajamankala University of Technology to open the two years continuation program for students who finished advanced courses from the College of Dramatic Arts to obtain a bachelor level degree in dance education. (Dance Curriculum of Rajamangala University of Technology, 1984:5). This program emphasised training dance teachers who connected with the curriculum of the College of Dramatic Arts; the general course of education and teaching method was managed by the Rajamangala Institute, while the specific course of dance training was arranged by the College of Dramatic Arts. After the establishment of this program, there were an increasing number of dance teachers teaching classical dance across educational levels. This was the result of the great expansion of traditional dance training and disseminating the dance version of the Fine Arts Department throughout the country.

The New System to the New Standard of Dance Training

The radical change in dance curriculum occurred when the Thai national education plan was reformed in 1977 from a percentage system to a credit system. This credit system

was the new method by which the curriculum was divided into many subjects, and each subject had a different credit which depended on the relative importance of that subject. After the reformation of the educational system in Thailand, the College of Dramatic Arts followed this policy by adapting traditional dance training to suit the new system. The dance training was subdivided into many subjects and levels in the curriculum and the criteria for dance practical examination were formulised for consistent evaluation. This new curriculum was the main factor in changing traditional dance training to become the model of dance pedagogy today.

Compared to the previous curriculum in 1945, there was a somewhat different method of dance training in that the new system tended to focus on quantity rather than quality. Many different dance pieces and various scenes of dance drama were taught in the class rather than focusing on the quality of traditional dance movements. This was different from dance training in the past in that the traditional daily repetition of basic dance movement, which was the main method for the perfection of dance and one-to-one of training in embodiment of the character, disappeared. This resulted in the lack of a strong foundation for the students and a decrease in the quality of dance. In interviews with senior teachers (Tantranoon, 2014; Iamsakul, 2015), they criticised the fact that many special dances, such as the higher levels of *Naphat* and the performance of main characters in dance drama, which had been specially taught only to the most highly skilled students, were now being taught in general classes. The quality of dance fell because the teachers did not have much time to concentrate on individual students; they only handed down the dance movement and evaluated them through examinations, which mainly focussed on their ability to memorise the series of dance movements in each piece.

The students today learn a lot of dance pieces, they learn everything. Opposite to my training, we learn only *Phleng Cha-Phleng Reo*, *Naphat*, repeat and repeat, so we memorise and dance beautifully. But, nowadays, student learns too many, learn every

dance piece, so they cannot memorise everything, just for passing an exam, and then forget. (Iamsakul, interview, 2015) translated by author

In the new system of dance curriculum, the dance course was divided into three levels (as in the previous curriculum) but the period of time was changed to a Preliminary Course extending over a period of three years, an Intermediate Course extending over a period of three years and an Advanced level extending over a period of two years. Each level also included many dance pieces with not only the traditional basic dance movements as in the past but also numerous newly-created short dance pieces of the Fine Arts Department and reconstructions of dance drama from the mid-1940s. It needs to be emphasised here that this dance curriculum was in effect from 1977 to the early 2000s. Even though, this curriculum was ameliorated in 1991, the general curriculum was improved for all subjects, except for dance. In other words, dance training in this curriculum remained unchanged for almost thirty years. This clearly shows why the standardised and formalised dance version from the Fine Arts Department has become strongly embedded in Thai dance training and had been preserved as a new tradition to this day. To understand this situation, I will discuss in depth each level of dance training by using my own experience of having been a student who was trained with this curriculum at the College of Dramatic Arts from 1989 to 1997.

In this new curriculum, the dance lessons both resembled and differed from the traditional dance training. In the first level, students were initially selected to train in different characters: male, female, demon and monkey corresponding to their individual physique. In this study, I will emphasise the female character's training as this was my training. In the three years of the preliminary level, students started training with the fundamental series of traditional dance movements similar to the past; for example, the basic exercise, *Phleng Cha* and *Phleng Reo* (Slow and Fast Tempo), the primary *Naphat* dance, *Maibot Yai* and *Maibot Lek* (the alphabet of dance movement), and the short dance pieces such

as *Ram See Nun*, and *Ram Krisdaamphinihan*. These basic exercises were similar to traditional training, but the process of embodying the dance movement was different in that the student did not practice by repeating the basic movements but learnt the new dance pieces instead: for example, many simplified dances, such as *Ramwong* which was created in Phibun period or the patriotic songs of Luang Wichit, were taught in classes which had never encountered these dances (in the previous curriculum). The interesting fact here is that these simplified dances were also added to the curricula of primary and secondary schools (Sophon, 1990: 168). These dances were easy for amateur students to learn and the lyrics, which were also comprehensible, were infused with patriotism (Iamsakul, interview, 2015).

At the intermediate and advanced levels, numerous newly-created dance pieces and the revived dance drama were selected as training materials for the class, which tended to change the method of dance training and standardised the form of dance drama. As discussed in the first section, the higher level of traditional dance training was the method of embodying character and creativity. Indeed, students should be trained by performing many roles in dance drama until they absorb dance movements which they can then interpret by following dramatic texts. However, this traditional process was rarely found in the new educational system because dance movement was fixed to training from reconstructed dance drama which did not allow the students to create productions by themselves. In the curriculum, the dance course was divided into several different subjects: Classical Dance I and II, Solo Dance I and II, Miscellaneous Dance I and II, Thai Folk Dance I and II, *Naphat* dance I and II, Dance Drama Extract Performance I and II, Character Interpretation I and II, War Parade Dance I and II, and Technique using Weapons in Drama I and II (The intermediate level of dance curriculum, 1981 and the Advance level, 1984). Most dance pieces taught in each level were from the reconstruction of dance drama in the revival period: for example, in a course called

‘Character Interpretation’, students were trained to interpret the different characters in distinct styles of dance genres of the past. To train students in *Lakhon Chattri*, some scenes from *Manohra* dance drama were selected to be taught, even though this production was not from the original *Lakhon Chattri*. It was a state innovation in 1954 which I discussed in Chapter Two. The new system has resulted in traditional dance becoming static and standardised in the form of dance movement based on the dances adapted by the Fine Arts Department. This reinvented dance has been repeatedly passed down to the new generations until the present day because all these dances were perceived to be traditional.

To understand how the adapted dance of the Fine Arts Department has been standardised for dance training and was disseminated across educational levels, I analyse a course titled ‘Thai Folk Dance’ as a clear example. In this new curriculum, students were not only trained in the traditional court dance but also in folk dance. As noted earlier, every branche of the College of Dramatic Arts has a folk dance class, which focusses on the local dance in those regions; for example, the Reginal College in Roi-et and Kalasin trained the northeastern dance, while those in Pathalung and Nakhorn Si Thammarat focussed on the southern dance. However, in the Thai Folk Dance course in the central college, students did not learn the authentic folk dance from local areas but learned the adapted folk dances of the Fine Arts Department instead. Four adapted folk dances, *Ten Gam Ram Kiew* (the Rice Harvest Dance), *Ram Yeo*, *Tuet-Teung* (Drum Dance), and *Serng Kratip Khao* (Rice Basket Dance) were taught in class. These dances were created during the 1960s as part of the project to preserve folk dance in rural areas. In November 1961, the Fine Arts Department initially assigned the dance artists and musicians of the Division of Dance and music to do field work; record, observe and learn the folk performing arts from the local people (So.Tho.0701.1/114⁸²). The first round of field

⁸² So.Tho.0701.7/114 The project of filming and recording the folk performance ‘Then Gam Ram Kiew’
โครงการถ่ายทำภาพยนตร์และอัดเสียง ‘เพลงเดินกำรำเคียว’

work took place at the Yan Mathee village in Nakhon Sawan's Payuhakhiri District to observe and film *Ten Gam Ram Kiew*, which presented the celebration of the villagers after harvest through songs and dance. In June 1963, The Fine Arts Department continued the project to observe a *Ram Yeoi* performance in the Khanjanaburi province, and adapted it to perform on stage on the occasion of welcoming the King and Queen of Malaysia at the Thammasat Auditorium on 25 February 1964 (So.Tho.0701.40/92⁸³). In 1966, *Teut-Teung* from the central region of Thailand was adapted to be performed in Myanmar, and *Serng Kratip Khao* from Sakonakhon province, the northeast of Thailand, was adapted to first be performed to welcome the President of South Korea at the National Theatre on 11 February 1966 (Yupho, 1973:219).

These adapted folk dances were not only heavily promoted on the stage both in Thailand and touring abroad but also broadcast on the radio and television as well as in the educational system (SoTho.0701.1/114:16). Moreover, the history of these folk dances was literally recorded in a book entitled *The Arts of Dance Drama or The Handbook of Thai Dance*, written by Dhanit Yupho and published in 1973. This has been used in teaching and frequently cited by many scholars when discussing the topic of Thai folk dance. M. R. Krukrit Pramroj, a royalist and a renowned scholar, criticised, in the keynote address of a seminar on 'Thai Dance' at Thammasat University in 1991, the fact that these folk dances of the Fine Arts Department had destroyed the sense of local dance and instead strongly influenced by court dance style (Pramroj, 1991:104). However, these state versions are still performed on the stage today, and continue to be handed down to the new generations because they were added to the curriculum of the College of Dramatic Arts in the central area and disseminated across educational levels to represent the central folk dance style.

⁸³ So.Tho.0701.40/92 *Ram Yeoi* (รำเทย)



Figure 4.5. *Ten Gam Ram Kiew*, or the Rice Harvest Dance. Photo courtesy of the Fine Arts Department.

In terms of dance theory, the knowledge of traditional dance and its history researched by the Fine Arts Department from the revival period was formalised and standardised to be taught in the curriculum. As mentioned in Chapter Two, with the state project to revive ancient Thai dance in the mid-1940s, ancient dance and its history were greatly studied and propagated in many publications. The contents of these studies and many books written by the Fine Arts Department were used as main sources to teach in the curriculum which was further subdivided into categories such as History of Thai Drama, Naphat, Thai Stage Costume and Makeup, Distinguished Persons in Thai Dance, Thai Classical Dance Terminology, and Principles and Methods of Stage Performance (*The Advance Level of Dance Curriculum*, 1984). This clearly shows how the standardised history and codification of dance drama by the state were instilled into the new generations and transmitted to the next via the educational system. In the course ‘History of Thai Drama’; for instance, the history of *Khon* and *Lakhon* and these distinctive styles of dance drama were taught by using the books written by Dhanit Yupho as a main source. In this course, it was taught that traditional dance drama had six genres: *Lakhon Chatri*, *Lakhon Nai*,

Lakhon Nok, Lakhon Phanthang, Lakhon Dukdamban and Lakhon Sepha. Using these, the course tended to fix the form of dance and its principles instead of understanding its development. Due to dance pedagogy, dance drama during this period did not develop much. However, this has changed and dance theory today has been improved and developed particularly with regards to the treatment of classical dance in higher education, which I will discuss in the following section.

It is important to acknowledge that because of the educational system, the various styles of dance movements initially snowballed into only one version rather than depicting multiplicities, specifically of the lineage of teachers, or *Thaang*. As mentioned earlier, *Thaang* is a specific mode of dance movement which is associated with individual dance teachers to create dance pieces or express a character in dance drama. There were many *Thaang* in each piece of Thai classical dance, which depended on whoever directed the dance production. In an interview with senior dance teachers, Chalanukhro and Pungprayong (interview, 2015), it was explained to me that different styles of dance movement were passed down even by the same teacher. This was because the teachers not only disseminated the particular dance which had been handed down from their lineage but also the choreography of the new dance movement to suit the character of the individual dancer. This technique gradually disappeared when traditional dance was taught in a class. Various styles of dance movement were standardised into only one version. This was evident in the record of a dance seminar during 1990s. Since 1994, after the dance was included in the new curriculum, many dance seminars were arranged by the College of Dramatic Arts to record the dance movement in a training manual for the teachers both in central and regional Colleges. The objective of the seminars was to set the standard of dance to be uniform for all dance teachers and to preserve the traditional dance from the past (the College of Dramatic Arts, 1995). As part of this seminar, many dance pieces in the curriculum were recorded as videos and published in papers. This

record is still used in today as a standard lesson of dance training, and this kind of seminar runs even today (Saithondkham, interview, 2016).

The period between the 1980s and the 1990s was claimed by many scholars to be a period of stagnation of Thai classical dance drama in regard to dance pedagogy. This issue was clearly discussed in the seminar on Thai dance arranged by the Thai Institute of Thammasat University held on 14-15 March, 1991, and led by M. R. Kukrit Pramoj, the royalist who had experience of training in court tradition who formed the amateur *Khon* troupe at Thammasat University. In this seminar, scholars from different fields related to Thai dance were invited to discuss the topic concerning the deterioration of classical dance in Thailand. Many topics, such as the standard of classical dance, the problem of dance pedagogy in different dance institutes, the various opinions on the development of Thai classical dance and the role of state and private organisation in the propagation of Thai dance, were discussed. From the record of this seminar, the main problem of dance development did not come from only the social change of modernisation, but also the changed educational system in the College of Dramatic Arts and the organisation of the Fine Arts Department because these institutes were the only main organisations for preserving and transmitting traditional dance. Pramoj and Charmonman, dance scholars claimed there was an imbalance between these two organisations and that the productions of the Fine Arts Department were adapted too much to suit the taste of new audiences, while the College of Dramatic Arts attempted to strongly preserve the traditional dance. This is the reason why traditional dance was not developed correctly.

The Fine Arts Department were divided into two Schools or two thoughts, which the College of Dramatic Arts was too strict and try to preserve the ancient dance in which the thing should not be preserved, but be preserved. On the other hand, Ajarn Sari

Wangnaithum⁸⁴, he played for tourists, he adapted and change the dance unconcernedly until the production of Ajarn Sari was not Thai dances anymore, and those of the College of Dramatic Arts were neither. It was such a museum. (Thammasat Univerity, the seminar of classical dance, 1991:92).

Traditional Dance Training in Modernity: 1996 to Present

By the end of the 1990s and the start of the early 2000s, there was a major change in the dance curriculum when the reformation of the College of Dramatic Arts was expanded to include teaching in higher education. From the previous curriculum of the College of Dramatic Arts, graduated students in the advanced courses could only obtain an associate's degree. If they wanted to obtain a bachelor level degree, they had to transfer to the two year continuation program of the Rajamankala University of Technology, or to another institute or university. Before continuing to discuss the reformation of dance curriculum in the state's dance college, I will provide the overall picture of higher education in Thailand to contextualise how it impacted the curriculum in the College of Dramatic Arts. In university education, Chulalongkorn University was the first institute to offer a higher degree in dance at three levels: a bachelor degree in 1988, master degree in 1992 and doctoral degree in 2000. This dance curriculum has become the new model for the department of dance in other university and in the reformation of State dance school. Indeed, the emergence of a dance curriculum in bachelor education was covered by building a program beginning in the 1970s in teacher's colleges and continuing for two decades in which seven⁸⁵ performing arts programs were constructed at universities across the nation (Virulrak, 1999: 99). In order to clearly understand the shift of dance training in modern time, I focus this section on only the dance programs in the College of

⁸⁴ Sari Wangnaithum was the Director of the Office of the Performing Arts during 1980s

⁸⁵ Seven Universities, where offer the performing arts faculties, are Chulalongkorn University, Thammasat University, Silpakorn University, Bangkok University, Srinakharinwirot University, Prince of Songkla University, and Mahasarakham University

Dramatic Arts and the newly established national university, Bunditpatanasilpa Institute because they are the main state institutes under the Ministry of Culture, where directly preserves and promotes cultural dance.

In 1998, the government established the Bunditpatanasilpa Institute as the national university for the arts, including the performing arts and fine arts, in order to elevate an academic and professional standard in the Arts. In the first few years of establishment, Bunditpatanasilpa Institute still co-operated with the College of Dramatic Arts by offering the two- year continuing programme for advanced students from the College of Dramatic Arts. Since 2002, Bunditpatanasilpa Institute was transferred from Ministry of Education to Ministry of Culture under the Fine Arts Department, as the main art institute with the responsibility of arranging national cultural art education. The College of Dramatic Arts including fourteen regional branches were transferred under this new Institute. Consequently, the two-year advanced course of the College of Dramatic Arts was abolished and expanded into the four-year bachelor degree program in Bunditpatanasilpa Institute. In 2007, a transition was marked in the organisational structure when the Bunditpatanasilpa Institute was elevated to a status that was equal to that of a department, distinguishing itself from the Fine Arts Department and then functioning directly under the Ministry of Culture. (The Government Gazette, 9 July 2007). In the new organisational structure, the national art institutes were subdivided into two levels: the College of Dramatic Arts was responsible for six years of secondary school level, and Bunditpatnasilpa Institute was in charge of the four-year bachelor level degree. All of these situations greatly affected Thai dance training as it caused many changes in dance curriculaum and development of dance creativity.

It needs to be discussed here that the other factor of change in dance curriculum—in 1999, a year after the establishment of Bunditpatanasilpa—was a great reform of education in

Thailand: the National Education Act of B.E.2542 (1999) was issued with many changes in the Thai educational system. Internal and external quality assurance standards were established in order to assess and monitor the educational quality and standard of institutions (1999:6). This reform of educational policy affected all curricula in Thailand, including the dance curriculum: the curriculum had to be assessed and developed every four years. As I mentioned earlier, in the previous dance curriculum, dance training remained unchanged from the 1970s to 1990s. To follow the policy, the dance curriculum was deeply reformed which resulted in many changes in traditional dance training. In order to clearly understand how dance practice was adjusted and changed, I will discuss specifically upon each individual level.

College of Dramatic Arts: Secondary Education of Dance

As a result of educational reformation and the reorganisation of dance institutes, traditional dance training had to be reconstructed to suit each level of the dance curriculum. In the new curriculum, the primary level of dance training was still maintained, but there was a dramatic change in the intermediate level. As was noted earlier, in the previous dance curriculum, dance training was divided into many different subjects relating to the category of dance, for example, Classical Dance, Miscellaneous Dance, Thai Folk Dance, *Naphat* dance, Dance Drama Extract Performance. Each category was taught at a different level with a specific purpose of training. In an interview with Phengsok (2516), dance teacher in the College of Dramatic Arts, she explained that previously in the first year of the intermediate level, students trained in classical dances such as *Rabam Sii Bot*, *Cha-Reo Rabam*, *Rabam Nathaauthyan*, which helped students to have a strong foundation of dance movement. In the second year, they trained in the Miscellaneous Dance course and in higher levels of *Naphat* Dance as preparation to perform on the stage. In the final year, students learned some scenes to understand the basics of expression in dance drama. This was a necessary step in traditional practice to

enable intermediate students to have strong foundations before training at an advanced level.

However, after reformation in 1999, all of these former lessons changed in the new curriculum. The dance category was separated in training at every level and each level contained several types of dance pieces. In other words, dance practice was not taught step-by-step as traditional training. In the new curriculum, two or three pieces from each category were taught in ascending order of difficulty. (Piromrak, interview, 2016). For example, in the first term of the intermediate level, students trained in one classical dance called *Gritsadaapinihaan* dance, two *Naphat* dances called *Sathukarn* and *Sa-me Kuang*, and two Miscellaneous dances called *Thawarawadee*, *Fon Laokhamhom* and one Folk Dance called *Rong-Ngeng* dance (dance curriculum for intermediate level, 2001:39-40). Many teachers complained that this new curriculum caused many problems in dance training: it confused students when they trained in the dance category separately, and they could not memorise and distinguish between the different styles of dance. Moreover, some traditional dance training for intermediate level was transferred to be taught at the higher level of the bachelor degree instead. According to *Rabam Sii Bot*, for instance, as quoted in section one, it was the most important dance for basic dance training so dancers could perfect their dance movements as well as enhance interactive skills with other dancers, and develop skill in following dance patterns. Consequently, there was a lack of good foundational skill for new generations. Many teachers (Chalanukhro, 2015; Phengsok, 2014 and Iamsakul, 2015) emphasise that when students do not train in *Rabam Sii Bot* as a basic dance, they do not have a strong foundation and lack the skills to perform in dance dramas.

It is worth noting that dance training in primary and intermediate levels today tends to focus on short dance pieces instead of dance dramas because dance pieces are easy to

learn and are often performed on stage rather than dance dramas. As a result of the functional change in traditional dance to promote Thai culture and serve new audiences and tourists, dance students are mainly trained to perform for those purposes. Many short dance pieces, which are popular to perform, are selected because they are suitable to teach in the class instead of training in dance drama. This is a huge change in dance training especially in the process of character embodiment which helps dancers to enhance their skills. In an interview with Piomrak, a dance master who used to be on the committee to develop the dance curriculum, he explained that due to social change and an increasing demand in traditional dance to promote Thai culture, the short dance pieces are more attractive than traditional dance drama. It would better to train students in many short dance pieces because they can perform them, while dance drama is difficult to perform, and that is only performed on the stage of the Fine Arts Department. Moreover, Piomrak also reasoned that to follow the new educational policy in 1999 concerning the standard of curriculum assessment, all courses in the curriculum should be applicable to modern life; therefore, traditional training has to be adjusted and developed to follow social change (Piomrak, interview, 2516). This new idea of practice tends to reduce the skill of dance students in which they do not understand how to convey feelings into dance gesture, which is the most important process to make the performance more attractive. Moreover, this also changes the attitude of new generations towards precisely understanding the aesthetic of traditional dance drama and the core of dance training. However, this process of embodiment has been transferred to teaching students at the higher levels instead, which I discuss in the following section.

The National University for cultural dance: the Higher Education of Dance Training

After the establishment of Bunditpatanasilpa institute in 1998, there was a dramatic change in traditional dance training and dance development especially in higher education. The most important factor of that change is the establishment of two dance faculties: Education Program in Thai Drama Education and Fine Arts Program in Thai Drama. The Education Program aims to train students to be dance teachers, while the Fine Arts Program is aimed at training students want to be dance performance artists. This idea of separating two programs was derived from the finding of the doctoral research of Sirichichan Fahchamroon (1996), who used to be the Head of Dramatic Arts College, the General Director of the Fine Arts Department and presently the Rector of Bunditpatanasilpa Institute (Vannalee, interview, 2516). Fahchamroon's research *The Evolution and Scenario of the Colleges of Dramatic Arts in the Thai Arts and Cultural Development* analysed the problems of dance teaching in the Dramatic Arts College and proposed future alternatives and scenarios of the College. The research concluded that in order to elevate the standard of dance education, the national university for cultural art should be established and offer specific programs for dance teachers, dance performing artists, dance researchers and technicians in theatre (Fahchamroon, 1996:305).

However, after two decades of running these programs, there were many disagreements between teachers. In an interview with one teacher (2016) who was a part of committee of establishment and presently teaching at Bunditpatanasilpa, he explained that opening two different programs for dance teachers and dance artists is ideal but not practical. This teacher claimed that the separation of the faculties has caused many problems. Firstly, the career path of performing dance artists in Thailand was limited; the Office of Performing Arts, the Fine Arts Department was the main source of work and a few dance companies that served traditional dancers. It might be difficult for dance graduates to find a job.

Secondly, these curricula overlapped especially in dance training, so it was difficult to identify what lessons suited teachers and artists precisely. This was different from the traditional dance training which never distinguished between dancers and teachers. Good dancers had to train in dance as much as they could until they gained experience and were mature enough to be dance teachers. Nevertheless, this teacher also suggested that it might be better to integrate these two programs in one degree and have many optional courses for students to select their specialisms on their own. In order to understand how these programs were different in training and developed dance, I will discuss each curriculum.

The curriculum of Education Program in Dance Drama Education outlines five years to prepare teachers of dance in the primary school and secondary school. The course is five years long because the national educational policy indicated that every teacher course in Thailand must spend a year on a teaching internship. In this program, dance students mainly study general education, including courses such as Foundation of Education, Introduction to Curriculum development, Psychology of Teachers and Special Education and so forth, preparing them for educational field. In the dance major, there are many subjects that overlap with the Fine Arts Program; for example, Aesthetics for Drama and Music, History of Thai Drama, and Thai Dancing Rituals and Etiquettes (the Curriculum of Education Program in Dance Drama Education, 2012). Interestingly, the theory of Thai traditional dance, dance costume and Thai belief in *Wai Khru* Ceremony and sacredness in dance have still been preserved and taught in both programs. In terms of dance practice, students in the Education Program did not train as hard as the traditional training, they train for only the first four foundation subjects, together with the Fine Arts student. These four foundation courses include important pieces of classical dance such as *Rabam Sii Bot*, high level of *Naphat* dance and some scene of Dance Drama. The Education program mostly consists of many simplified or short dance pieces instead of dance drama because the short dance pieces could be used to teach young students. In an interview with

Aranyanak, a dance teacher in Educational Program, he explained that this program tended to train students in a generic dance program wherein they learned several types of dances rather than specialising in only traditional dance. This is because the primary school and secondary school require dance teachers who can teach in any subject and train amateur students.



Figure 4.6. Training in the Class ‘Dance II: Leading Male and Female Roles in Drama’ in 29 March 2016 Photograph by the researcher.

The Fine Arts Program in Thai Drama is part of the new curriculum, which differs from previous dance training in its aim to prepare dance artists instead of dance teachers. This program combines both traditional training and modern elements. In traditional training, the students are not only trained in a basic form of dance training similar to those in the Dance Education Program, but also emphasise training in being a character in dance drama. The course, called ‘Performing Skills: Leading Male and Female Roles I, II and III’ is a high level course for performing dance students to practice character embodiment in dance drama. In this course, the senior artists from the Fine Arts Department or the national artists, who used to perform in that specific character, are invited to teach the students (Saithongkum, interview, 2016). Dance drama teaching in these courses are

mostly from the productions of the Fine Arts Department in revival period. This is a reason why the neo-traditions of *Khon* and *Lakhon* of the Fine Arts Department have been continually transmitted and become a new standard of traditional Thai dance, which will prove to be difficult to change in the future. It is interesting to note that the teacher-student system is also still strong in Thai dance training; even in modern education, especially in the process of dissemination in dance drama. Kongthaworn (interview, 2016), a dance teacher who taught these courses, described that even though she has a lot of experience in teaching and performing in dance drama, she dares not teach this course by herself unless she receives permission from the teacher.

To prepare students for being a performing dance artist, the Fine Arts Program also offers many courses in western perspectives to increase the choreographic and creative understanding and to expand views of traditional dance as a creative art. The courses, such as Choreography, Acting, Contemporary Dance and Project in Design for Drama, are added onto this program. These courses are taught by a specialist or teacher who has a background of training in western drama (Saithongkum, interview, 2016). The course 'Project in Design for Drama', for example, aims to develop a creative skill to produce dance, including the skill in art management and organisation (the curriculum of the Fine Arts Program, 2012). This course is taught by the well-known artist specialist in light and sound design. In March 2016, I had the chance to see the final project of this course producing by the third year students, the production *Thumnan Nora* (Legends of *Nora*). This production presented the ancient Thai myth of the original *Nora*, depicting the story of Khun Srisathra, the first dancer of *Nora*, a dance drama from the south of Thailand. Phatcharaphan Laodee, the a director of this production, described to me that he learned a lot from this course especially the process of staging a production, such as constructing the plot, design set, light and sound, costume design, and modernising traditional dance to make it more interesting and modern. He also created a new dance piece called *Nora*

Taengtua (Dressing Nora), which is adapted from the concept of the traditional dance *Taengtua*⁸⁶ in *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance drama, and hybridised with movements from *Nora*. Interestingly, after the program offered these courses of western perspectives, traditional dance and drama have tended to produce contemporary styles which greatly affects dance creativity.



Figure 4.7. Poster advertising a production of *Thumnan Nora*. Courtesy of Phatcharaphan Laodee, the director of *Thumnan Nora*.

⁸⁶ *Taengtua* is the solo traditional dance in which characters show the process of dressing in *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance drama.



Figure 4.8. A Performance of *Thumnan Nora* at Rama III Bridge Park on 27 March 2016. Courtesy of Phatcharaphan Laodee.

The other factor of change in dance training was the final graduation project. In both dance curricula, those of the Education Program and Fine Arts Program, two final productions were required for senior students: one with ‘the Traditional Dance’ and ‘the Creative Dance.’⁸⁷ ‘The Traditional Dance’ was a project wherein students were individually handed over the dance training. Students had to seek out a senior master or national artist who specialised in the selected character and train with them for a few months or one semester. After the process of training, students were required to present their performance on the stage with a paper, and senior masters or national artists were invited to comment and assess those performances. Remarkably, in this project, many ancient dances, which were not in the curriculum, were revived to pass down which brought back the concept of teacher-student system in traditional training. This reveals

⁸⁷ This module is common for universities offering dance major, a feature modelled on the Department of Dance, Chulalongkorn University because it was the first program at University level.

the complex ways in which traditional practicing was sustained within institutional structures. It is a good way to preserve traditional dance and develop the quality of dance as well as the relationship between teacher and student.



Figure 4.9. The graduation project of ‘the Traditional Dance’ at Wangna Theatre
Left: Performers listen to feedback from senior teachers.
Right: A student pays respect to her teacher, who handed down the dance to her.
Photographs by the researcher, 25 January 2016.

The other project for graduation is ‘the Creative Dance’ where students have creative freedom and autonomy over a dance piece. ‘The Creative Dance’ project has to contain a clear concept presented with new song design, costume design and choreography. Interestingly, the project manifests differently across the two programs. In dance teacher program, it was still based on traditional dance patterns, while in the dance performing program, it was based on modern and contemporary styles (Vannalee, interview, 2516). As noted earlier, the main differences in these programs is the course where creative practice is taught: only a few courses offer creative dance in the teacher program, while many of those exist in dance artist programs. The new creations of creative dance course in the teacher program are not different from the traditional ones, but those in the Fine Arts Program are certainly different.

It is worth noting that, the newer creative practices arising from senior projects in the Fine Arts Program are often selected to perform on stage to promote Thai culture, instead of those from the traditional program. In addition, some of them, which are popular to perform at that the moment, are included as training for the class. Saitongkum, the Deputy Dean of the Fine Arts Faculty, explained to me that when Bunditpatanasilpa Institute was transferred to function directly under the Ministry of Culture, the dance faculty were frequently invited to perform for events promoting Thai culture. These cultural events were arranged by the state both in Thailand and abroad. The best dance pieces from graduating classes were selected to perform for those events. Popular dances from new creative practice projects were taught in a course called ‘Miscellaneous Dance’ to save time for practice. This course is flexible and changes every academic year depending on which dance is popular. For example, a dance titled *Sakkaratewarat* (Worshipping the God King) was composed by senior students in 2013. This dance piece was based on the dance at the Indrabhisek Royal Ceremony from the Ayutthaya period. The performance consists of dances of various courtiers honouring the monarch and pledging loyalty and devotion to King. The style of dress is inspired by the image of a Buddha in imperial dress and accessories from the early Ayutthaya period, along with the style of dress depicted in temple murals of the period. After choreography, *Sakkaratewarat* has been regularly performed on stage both in Thailand and abroad; for example, in the celebrating 260 years Buddhism of the Sayamwonga sect celebrations in Sri Lanka 16-21 August 2013, in The 6th Two Land One Heart Concert in 14-20 December 2013, and in 5th GMS Summit, 19 December 2014 (Saitongkam, 2015:63-64) At the moment, this dance is being taught to second year students in the Fine Arts Program.



Figure 4.10. The senior creative dance *Sakkaratewarat* (Worshipping the God King). Courtesy of Sapsathit Thimsuksai, choreographer of *Sakkaratewarat*

Conclusion

The government's support for Thai traditional dance and the educational system have undoubtedly been essential to the survival of classical dance today. The state policy regarding the preservation of classical dance for promoting Thai arts as well as dance pedagogy in the national conservatory were the main factors of change in traditional dance. After the government established the School of Dramatic Arts as the main dance academy to disseminate traditional dance, the notion of dance had to be formalised, and standardised, to be included in the curricula.

The neo-traditional dance reinvented by the State during the revival period of classical dance gradually became the new standard of dance when it was officially taught in the curriculum. As a result of both the policy to preserve traditional dance and the stagnancy of the dance curriculum for several decades, the dance and its creative processes were gradually fixed as

the Fine Arts Department version, which was then disseminated to dance curricula all over Thailand. As Reed (2010:172) discusses in the case of Berava, a Sri Lanka traditional dance:

While their legitimization as ‘traditional’ granted them a voice in the production of national culture, as well as certain amount of economic security in the field of dance education, it appears that ultimately, it became imprisoned by their identification with a tradition that ties them to a ‘backward’ past. They find themselves considered ‘too’ traditional, and their practices are deemed museum pieces.

The state dance version was to become a museum piece for a long period from the 1940s to the 1990s. However, by the end of the 1990s, post the reformation of the College of Dramatic Arts and the establishment of the national arts university, Bunditpatanasilpa Institute, the dance syllabus revealed significant changes in curricula. Classical dance in higher education tended to cause a dramatic shift in traditional dance creative processes, and in the aesthetic of dance training, which would comprise a new model of dance pedagogy for the future.

Conclusion

The period post-1932 marked a radical change in Thailand, not only in the social-political sphere but also in the transformation of traditional dance. The shift of traditional dance closely relates to the change of patronage from royalty and the elite, to the middle-class in government bureaucracy. This research offers a new perspective on the evolution, codification and modes of pedagogy of classical Thai dance in Thailand through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I analyse this evolution through the frameworks of nationalism, state authority and power in the reconstruction of dance knowledge, and the invention of tradition. This study is mainly focussed on the connection between three factors; socio-political change, spirituality in classical dance, and dance pedagogy, all of which have impacted upon the reconstruction of traditional dance and dance transmission in contemporary times.

Socio-Political Change

My thesis explores ways to understand the impact of socio-cultural change upon traditions and culture in Thai society as the main point of the analyses. I focus on two remarkable periods; the post-1932 revolution, and the mid-1940s after World War II. Both periods oversaw different concepts of cultural policy and significantly affected traditional dance practice today. Chapter One focusses on the revolution of 1932 wherein the royal arts were initially transferred to government support and traditional court dance was neglected before being adapted into a new theatrical style. Chapter Two presents the period after World War II when the power of monarchy was overthrown and traditional dance and royal activities were revived as classical high arts. These two chapters provide the groundwork to understand the transformation of Thai dance in relation to Thai socio-political change, cultural policy and the new educational system.

Chapter One begins with a historical background of the socio-political context and royal patronage in court dance from a period of absolute monarchy to the first decade of the revolution of 1932. This chapter paves the way to a better understanding of the transformation of Thai traditional dance before changing the supporter base from the aristocrats to the state. Before the revolution, Siam was governed under absolute monarchy with a feudal system which distinguished between different social hierarchies. This system also endorsed different theatrical aesthetics, distinguishing sharply between high dance arts and popular theatre. An unequal system led to a coup, and the revolution in 1932 wherein social equality was a key aim. This political change had an indirect effect on traditional court dance.

After the revolution of 1932, the central support for the arts changed from the court which was representative of the monarchy, to the state which used dance to serve middle-class audiences. The new national arts centres were the Fine Arts Department and the Academy of Dance and Music; the new state established these centres to conserve, standardise and officially transmit traditional dance to newer generations. The new patronage and management of the state brought about radical change in traditional dance. For example, the status of court dancers changed from royal officials to civil servants under the bureaucracy; the role, function and creation of classical Thai changed from royal regalia and elite pleasure to becoming a dance for the nation; and the mode of dissemination of dance changed from training under personal teachers to a new educational system.

However, during the first period of the revolution, neither the Fine Arts Department nor all of the royal arts including *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance drama were supported and promoted by the government. The full production of traditional performing arts, particularly classical forms were rarely performed, and *Khon*, the royal masked play, was not included in the dance curriculum. Luang Wichit, the first General Director of the Fine Arts Department, had made efforts to promote it, and raised the public profile of the

School and the Fine Arts Department by producing a new style of theatrical production in order to attract popular audiences. It can be said that this period witnessed the decline of the high arts of monarchy, replaced by the nationalist style of Luang Wichit's productions.

The new theatrical genre, with elements of simplified classical dance, produced during this period was known as the 'Luang Wichit play', a hybrid and nationalist dance theatre, combining Thai and western elements. *Luat Suphan* (The Blood of Suphan People), his first play, was also his most popular, and later became a new model for his other patriotic plays. The characteristics of Luang Wichit's plays comprised of myth and historical incidents, realist acting, patriotic songs with simplified classical dance movements. His plays aimed not only to promote Thai culture, but also to play an important role in supporting the new government's policy. His plays have been taught in the College of Dramatic Arts and occasionally performed on the stage of the Fine Arts Department. In addition, his patriotic songs are taught as a compulsory part of the national syllabus for primary school students or beginner dancers and are also used to propagate nationalist sentiments today.

The turning point in Thai society and Thai performing arts occurred in the period of Cultural Revolution, also known as the Phibun period. This period witnessed radical change in Thai traditional performances in the context of nation building and cultural policy that caused Siam to transform to Thailand. The traditional performing arts, drama and music were controlled and modernised to mimic cultural practices in western countries. During this time, the Fine Arts Department as the centre of cultural arts played an important role in not only producing theatre to help the state in propagating national cultural policy, but also in centralising and controlling several types of performing arts following the Royal Decree and other new regulations. However, even though this cultural policy did not hugely affect classical dance, it was the cause of the decline of

other traditional performances, particularly folk performance. Moreover, this cultural policy brought about the emergence of a new innovative dance through the merger of elite and ordinary tastes; the Standard *Ramwong* was created by the state, combining folk dance, classical dance and ballroom dance. This dance remains in performance to date, and continues to be passed on to newer generations.

Chapter Two presents the beginning of the revival of court dance in the mid-1940s after World War II. The project of reviving traditional dance was in operation alongside the emergence of a new Thai ideology and the establishment of the code of 'classicalism'. In this period, the politics changed to a new government order which attempted to revive the spirit of monarchy in order to resist a rising communist ideology. This development of monarchic ideals and royalty in Thai society emphasised the value and function of traditional court dance. This process of revival brought about the emergent category of 'classical' dance as a high art, which was distinct from popular culture as 'folk'.

As a consequence of the revival of classical dance and a policy of propagation, there was a dramatic change in traditional court dance, especially in its function and the creative processes. Although classical dance was valued as much as the high arts, the modern state used it as a tool to promote Thai culture and represented classical dance as the 'traditional' national export for the international tourist market. The function of court dance changed from being the royal entertainment to one that served popular audiences and tourism instead. In order to attract audiences, Thai classical dance needed to be modernised and adapted into short dance pieces, instead of being performed as part of a full traditional dance drama. It can be said that, from this period until the present, traditional dance has changed its function so as not to be solely preserved as a cultural signifier of Thai identity, but also become an art object commodified in and by the commercial world of tourism.

The reformation of the Office of Performing Arts and national dance school marked an important turning point in the social history of dance, for it was a moment when the modern state took over the role of being both patron and producer of Thai traditional dance. Since the initial appropriation in the mid-1940s, the Fine Arts Department played an important role in setting the standard of dance practice and dance knowledge, through publications and codification. The Fine Arts Department reshaped, manipulated and promoted classical dance by composing dance drama productions and publishing documents reproduced as photographs, in books, and through publicity material. The historical books of the Fine Arts Department have remained powerful in Thai society due to being republished, frequently cited and highly respected by dance teachers and students. Moreover, classical dance drama during this period was reinvented, reconstructed and modernised to suit the taste of new generations. This re-invented dance has been preserved and continually performed in the National Theatre, at international events, for national and global tourists, for Thai residents and international audiences. In addition, the reconstructed practices and formulised dance histories have been taught at the School of Dramatic Arts and have become the standard for dance training today.

Spirituality in Classical Dance

The Fine Arts Department not only promoted and reconstructed traditional Thai dance, but also revived a culturally prominent sense of ‘sacredness’ which I discuss in Chapter Three. This idea of spirituality in classical dance is linked to the rebirth of the King’s status in Thai society; when the power of the monarch was revived in the 1950s, the King was considered to be the highest spiritual authority of Thai society. The Fine Arts Department attempted to imbue classical dance with royal power in order to bring spiritual concerns of court dance back into state classical dance. This process involved the reconstruction of Thai customs and the rite of paying homage to teachers—the *Wai Khru* ceremony—as well as royal involvement in the passing of the tradition of the most

sacred of all dances, *Ong Phra Phirap*. It can be said that the power of royalty was the main factor in the revival of spiritual elements in classical dance in modern times.

The *Wai Khru* ceremony was redefined and resurrected under the project of traditional revival in the mid-1940s and the development of perceptions of its sacredness was in connection with the power of the King in 1961. This ceremony renders a sense of sacredness towards the dance teachers and expresses the dancer's belief in a higher power, dance knowledge, the teacher and the King. Moreover, under the state, the revival of the *Wai Khru* ceremony gradually led to a form of cultural objectification when the dance was used inevitably to express national identity.

The Fine Arts Department played a key role in disseminating and setting the standard for the ceremony. Newspapers also played an important role in the propagation of the *Wai Khru* ceremony to Thai society in modern times. In an attempt by the state to promote the *Wai Khru* ceremony in public, the booklets of the *Wai Khru* ceremony written by the Fine Arts Department were published both in Thai and English. The publication was powerful because it succeeded in strengthening and reconstructing not only the beliefs of dancers in the *Wai Khru* but also in standardising all the processes of the *Wai Khru*, even the qualification for the role of Master of *Wai Khru* ceremony. Today, the process of *Wai Khru*, the qualification of the *Wai Khru* master and modes of transmission have been restricted and controlled by the Fine Arts Department. This state authority caused the decline of traditional modes of dissemination wherein the relationship between teachers and pupils used to be personal and uncoded.

The *Wai Khru* ceremony was used as a state tool to regulate and standardise classical dance through dance pedagogy and the new educational system. The processes and levels of the *Wai Khru* were formalised, such as university dance curricula. In addition, the *Wai Khru* also demonstrates the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students in that

only top dancers are allowed to improvise the choreographies of Thai classical dance, and only with the approval of teachers.

It is important to consider the spiritual relationship of classical dances such as *Khon* and *Lakhon* with the *Wai Khru* ceremony. This is because the *Naphat* repertoire, the sacred piece of dance and music, is not only used to represent the Khru Gods and invite them to the ceremonial space in the *Wai Khru*, but also in *Khon* and *Lakhon* to depict verbal or physical movement of particular actions, such as walking, sleeping, and fighting. Therefore, the *Naphat* repertoire is respected by Thai dancers and musicians as a highly sacred piece and representative of sacredness. As a consequence of the construction of dance curricula, the training methods for the *Naphat* repertoire were standardised—and the classification of the dance movements systematically recorded—by the new educational system.

The authority of the state in regulating Thai classical dance is evident in disseminations of the *Ong Phra Phirap* dance, which was regarded as the most significant classical dance in the *Wai Khru* ceremony. The tradition of passing on the *Ong Phra Phirap* was officially invented and reconstructed after the early 1960s with the King's involvement. Royal and state powers have cohesively manipulated the setting of new standards and methods of transmission of the *Ong Phra Phirap*. As the consequence of royal intervention and state control, the *Ong Phra Phirap* was separated into two versions: the version of the Fine Arts Department which became the royal version because of the King's approval, and a second, unofficial version which performed privately even though it was the work of the same choreographer.

Dance Pedagogy

Chapter Four focuses on dance pedagogy, which was a new form of dance patronage and an instrument of the state to preserve and pass on traditional dance. The educational

system is the main factor in preserving, changing and developing classical dance in contemporary times. As a consequence of state monopoly over traditional dance training after the establishment of the national conservatory in 1934, notions of dance and traditional dance practices have changed in their being formalised, standardised, and added to dance curricula.

The changes in the new educational system have resulted in the loss of an essence of traditional dance training in many ways. In this research, I divide formal traditional dance training into three components: training in the form, embodiment of character and dance creativity. In the new pedagogical system, some core components are maintained while others have been changed. For example, the daily repetition of basic movement, which is the most important process for primary students, is neglected because of limited time in the class and an excessive number of dance pieces which are listed as necessary training in the curriculum. Moreover, the system has caused the decline of many variations of dance under different teacher lineages because only a specific line of dance is preserved and contained in the dance curriculum. In addition, creativity in dance drama has been severely limited because traditional performances were performed in accordance with genres codified by the state in the 1940s.

As a consequence of the state monopoly in traditional dance training, the neo-traditional dance reinvented by the Fine Arts Department during the revival of traditional dance in the 1940s became the new standard and has subsequently been taught to newer generations. The classical form of the state-approved version also influenced folk dances because of the establishment of regional Dramatic Arts Colleges all over Thailand. Between the 1940s and the 1990s, under the policy to conserve traditional dance and the increasing stagnancy of dance curricula, creative processes in dance were gradually formalised by the Fine Arts Department and then disseminated across dance curricula. This is the reason why classical dance, especially *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance dramas,

became akin to a preserved museum artefact. However, by the end of the 1990s, after the reformation of the educational system in Thailand and the reorganisation of the College of Dramatic Arts as well as the increasing numbers of dance curricula in higher education, traditional dance practice has been significantly changed in curricula, which have subsequently caused a dramatic change in traditional dance creativity, in the aesthetics of dance, which would become a new ideal of dance pedagogy for the future.

As part of the cultural process of dance reconstruction, Thai classical dance has long been reconstructed and reshaped by socio-cultural formations after the state patronage in 1930s. I have drawn on theories that situate the power of the state, such as Williams's idea of cultural process to evoke how the state mobilises selective tradition and Hobsbawm's concept of invented tradition. As Williams points out in outlining the concepts of the cultural process constituting tradition, institution and formation:

It is also a question of formations; those effective movements and tendencies, in intellectual and artistic life, which have significant and sometimes decisive influence on the active development of a culture, and which have a variable and often oblique relation to formal institutions. (Williams, 1977:117)

In Thailand, the two main institutions, the Fine Arts Department and the College of Dramatic Arts, are powerful political organisations that have preserved and provided traditional dance training from the revolution 1932 until the present. In the several decades of the state's monopoly, the state has been successful in the revival, promotion, and dissemination of Thai dance across Thai society. The government legitimised its authority to standardise and formalise the court dance and change it into a symbol of national identity to indicate the richness of Thai heritage. In this research, I have shown how the process of culture was reconstructed and how the transmission of dance knowledge and dance practice occurred from the period of revival to newer generations and how the dance was changed and developed in the modern world.

Classical Thai dance under state patronage can be understood as a symbol of power and cultural legitimacy. Thai classical dance—especially *Khon*, a masked dance drama—continues to retain its association with the power of the royal family and the ritual of the *Wai Khru* ceremony. As a result of this process, the classical dance has become a sacred dance that remains vital in the belief system of Thai dancers. The classical dance of the state was also indicative of the hierarchy that legitimated the dance versions of the Fine Arts Department, and the subsequent practice of these versions which helped to standardise the dance. Under the cultural policy of ‘preservation’, the version of the court dance propagated by the Fine Arts Department has long-lasting value in Thai society and has thus become a cultural aesthetic representative of ‘high art’ of Thai culture.

The educational system has also played an important part in the process of development, preservation and transmission of Thai classical dance. The development of dance curricula is the main factor in transmitting the invention of tradition onto the new generations. As a result, the revival dance of the Fine Arts Department has remained and continues to be performed. It is in no danger of disappearing because it is included in contemporary dance curricula. In order to develop the practice, I have suggested that the traditional dance training needs to be concerned with the essence of the dance rather than the quantity of dance pieces. Dancers should be earnestly trained to embody their feelings through dance movements and discover improvisation and creative techniques on their own instead of merely imitating the dance teacher. This would be the correct way to preserve and develop the traditional dance permanently. However, in the meantime, the other factor that would help to develop knowledge of the dance and enhance creativity is higher education and the increasing number of dance institutions. The academic study of dance would enable conservative dance teachers and dancers to extend dance knowledge and gain an insight into dance history, its cultural and socio-

political value, its creative context and its diversity. Moreover, as a result of the reformation of the educational system and subsequent competition between dance institutions, the new dance curriculum has been changed to suit the demand of modernisation, the purpose of which is mainly to prepare dance students for employment. Therefore, contemporary dance training somewhat tends to focus on creativity instead of merely preserving a traditional form.

Given processes of globalisation, traditional Thai dance has survived and changed context to serve the commercial world of cultural tourism. Traditional dance has been commodified to represent Thai national identity; it is commonly performed at Thai events, Thai restaurants and is even exported in international tourist markets to promote Thai culture. The tourism market becomes the career goal for newly trained traditional dancers. As a consequence, traditional dance has greatly developed and is now created to appeal to new target audiences. Traditional movements and a delicate style of dance have gradually been reduced in contemporary dance pieces, which are short and emerge from a hybrid interaction with folk dances.

Further research into the role of royal patronage in modern times in transforming Thai classical dance should be considered alongside state cultural policy. I would suggest a case study of the Royal *Khon* performance project, which is supported by a Foundation under the Royal Patronage, following Her Majesty the Queen's royal aspiration to preserve this art for a new generation by organising a series of special *Khon* performances. This project first started in 2010 and has now become the highlight of the annual cultural calendar. The speciality of these performances includes the new creation of elaborate costumes and ornaments combining ancient classical elements together with modern stage techniques to celebrate an ongoing revival of Thai art forms. The foundation also persuades dance students all over Thailand to audition for the performance. It is notable

that the tickets sold out very fast and additional performances are arranged, which hardly ever happens for the production of Thai classical dance.

This reconsideration of the evolution of Thai classical dance in this thesis offers a significant contribution to the disciplines of dance studies, Thai Cultural studies, and dance history. It has the potential to positively influence the current teaching of Thai classical dance in Higher Education establishments in Thailand. This research will also be useful to students, scholars and dance professionals in better understanding historical debates regarding the evolution of traditional Thai dance and its reconstruction in that they can devise new forms of dance drama or contemporized versions of traditionally based productions by using the roots of the tradition. The research also contributes new socio-political perspectives of the development of traditional dance. In addition, the thesis could provide better contexts for policy makers or government officials in relation to Thai art and culture, so they can find ways to conserve, develop and promote Thai art in light of the rapid change and demands of present day practices. In terms of dance education, the knowledge and analysis from this study could be applied to teaching dance and in developing Thai dance curricula, a move which is presently much needed in Thailand.

Glossary

Khon Mask Dance Drama

Khumnab Khru The ritual for the initiation for new students

Khrob Khru The ritual of being “covered”

Lakhon Dance Drama

Lakhon Chatri Popular Dance Drama

Lakhon Dukdamban Opera Dance Drama

Lakhon Nai Court Dance Drama

Lakhon Nok Outside court dance drama

Lakhon Phanthang Hybrid Dance Drama

Naphat A repertoire of two or three hundred pieces used for the various ritual including *Wai Khru* ceremony and also in *Khon* and *Lakhon* dance drama

Ong Phra Phirap Dance the sacred dance which regarded as the most significant *Naphat* in the *Wai Khru* ceremony and highest level of classical dance

Phleng Cha Slow Tempo

Phleng Reo Fast Tempo

Rab Mop The ritual of receiving for being a dance teacher

Ramwong. The new dance which invented during the period of Cultural Revolution. The standard *Ramwong* was combining both folk dance and classical dance and also used to disseminate nationalism and national cultural policy. *Ramwong* means ‘circle dance’ or ‘to dance in circle’, was adapted from the folk popular seasonal entertainment.

Ratthaniyom the cultural mandates or the guidelines for new national customs.

Thaang The term which refers to the lines of dancers which specifically highlights dance difference.

Ti-bot A dance language in which dancers use hand gestures to depict the text.

Wai Khru The rite of paying homage to teacher

Appendices

Appendices A: Timeline of Thai political context and the development of Thai classical dance

years	Political and Ideological context	The development of Thai classical dance
1932(2475)- 1937(2480)	<p>The Revolution of 1932: The coup d'état was led by the People's party, placing the monarchy under a democratic constitution. At that time, the institution of the monarchy was at a low ebb. King Rama VII abdicated in 1935 and nine- year-old King Ananda was proclaimed as the new King Rama VIII, but he and his family still remained in Switzerland.</p>	<p>In 1934, the state re-established the Fine Arts Department and the School of Dramatic Arts where royal patronage of the classical arts including court dance were transferred to these institutions.</p> <p>The court dance drama was not promoted and rarely performed on the stage of the FAD. <i>Khon</i>, classical dance drama, was not taught in the School of Dramatic Arts.</p> <p>Luang Wichit Wathakan was employed as the first General Director of the Fine Arts Department.</p> <p>In 1936, Luang Wichit produced <i>Luat Suphan</i>, a new dramatic form that combined the classical dance and western elements. <i>Luat Suphan</i> was a greatly successful patriotic play and became a blueprint for Luang Wichit's other plays.</p>
1938(2481)- 1945(2488)	<p>PM. Phibun had a cultural policy espousing anti-monarchism, nationalism, and pro-westernisation standards.</p> <p>During WWII, Phibun allied with the Japanese.</p> <p>In 1939-1942, Phibun issued the <i>Ratthaniyom</i>, cultural mandates aimed at creating a civilising and modernising country. The guidelines concerned the nation, livelihood and social etiquette.</p> <p>In 1939, the name of the country changed from Siam to Thailand.</p>	<p>Luang Wichit as the General Director of FAD was assigned to modernise traditional theatre to disseminate nationalism. He created a hybrid form of theatre, known as 'Luang Wichit Play' which later become a new theatrical genre. Some plays include:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">1937 <i>Phrachao Krunghthon</i> 1938 <i>Chaoying Saewi</i> 1939 <i>Nanchao</i> 1939 <i>Anusawari Thai</i> 1940 <i>Phokhun Phamuang</i></p> <p>These plays were greatly supported by the state and helped to promote national policies.</p> <p>The state promulgated the Royal Decree Prescribing Culture Concerning Theatrical Performances in 1942 and the Royal Decree Prescribing Artistic Culture Regrading Musical Performances, Singing and</p>

		<p>Recitation in 1943. These Royal Decrees adapted western classifications and aesthetics to develop Thai traditional performance, which brought about the decline of folk dance and popular theatre.</p> <p>A new standard dance called the <i>Ramwong</i> was created and used to disseminate nationalism and national cultural policy, combining folk dance classical dance and ballroom dance. This dance became popular and has remained in Thai society, passed on and preserved until the present.</p> <p>These Royal Decrees were repealed in 1946.</p>
1946(2489)-1957(2500)	<p>In 1946, King Rama VIII died suddenly and his brother, King Bhumibol was proclaimed King Rama IX when he was 18 years old. After coronation, the King went back to Switzerland to continue his studies. For two decades, no king had been in residence in Thailand and republican sentiments were strong.</p> <p>In 1948, Phibun staged a coup and took a second term as Prime Minister. He modified the new idea of Thai identity based on notions of paternalism.</p> <p>In 1949, Thailand became a member of UNESCO, and classical dance was preserved as it notionally presented the ‘richness’ of Thai heritage.</p>	<p>In 1946, the traditional dance revival project was in operation and the School of Dramatic Arts was reformed.</p> <p>The Office of Performing Arts was established and Dhanit Yupho was the head of the Office.</p> <p><i>Khon</i> and <i>Lakhon</i>, classical dance drama forms, were revived and regularly performed at the Silapakorn Theatre and taught as part of dance curricula.</p> <p>The <i>Wai Khru</i> Ceremony was first revived on October 15, 1945.</p> <p>In 1952, the Ministry of Culture was established and the Fine Arts Department was transferred from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Culture</p> <p>Classical dance was greatly promoted both in Thailand and abroad to reflect Thai identity</p> <p>Many printed documents about dance were published both in Thai and English which initially reconstructed the history and knowledge of Thai traditional dance.</p> <p>In 1954, the Music and Dance Public Organisation was established as an independent entity in order to support dance students in the School of Dramatic Arts. However, this public organisation was closed down, and all its tasks and duties were</p>

		<p>returned to the Office of Performing Arts in 1962.</p> <p>In 1954, the first production of <i>Manohra</i> was produced by the Music and Dance Public Organisation and it was very successful. Later this production became the new tradition of <i>Lakhon Chatri</i> which was preserved and transmitted to subsequent generations.</p>
1958(2501)-1968 (2511)	<p>Phibun was overthrown and Sarit Thanarat back as the new government. The new policy was mainly to revive the spirit of monarchy.</p> <p>In 1960, the state changed the national day by using the king's birthday instead the revolution day.</p> <p>In 1961, King Rama XI returned to Thailand</p>	<p>The Ministry of Culture and the National Culture Council was abolished.</p> <p>The King Rama XI started to get involved in the ceremony and supported Thai classical dance.</p> <p>King personally subsidised the FAD .He presided over the <i>Wai Khru</i> Ceremony. The FAD attempted to frame classical dance with royal power to bring the spirituality of court dance back to classical dance.</p> <p>In 1962, the new national theatre was built and supported by the government and the King.</p> <p>In 1963, the FAD invited the King to preside over the royal ritual for the transmission of the most sacred dance, the <i>Ong Phra Phirap</i>. This royal intervention powerfully authorised the standardisation of classical dance and resulted in the emergence of two lineages: the royal version and the unofficial version.</p>
1970 (2513)	Royalist military government took over again	<p>Classical dance was heavily promoted and rapidly disseminated throughout Thailand via the new educational system.</p> <p>In 1972, the School of Dramatic Arts was elevated from a school to a College of Dramatic Arts.</p> <p>In 1971, the first Regional College of Dramatic Arts was established in Chiangmai in the north of Thailand.</p>
1977 (2520)	The Thai national education plan was reformed in 1977.	From 1978-1994, the Regional College of Dramatic Arts was expanded across provinces across Thailand, which resulted in thirteen branches overall. As a result of the

		<p>establishment of these colleges, the folk dance form began to gain the central court dance influence and gradually changed local aesthetics.</p> <p>The traditional dance training was developed to suit the new educational system. The new system tended to focus on quantity rather than quality. Many dance pieces and various scenes of dance drama were taught in class rather than focusing on the quality of dance movements.</p> <p>The revival of <i>Khon</i> and <i>Lakhon</i> productions were restaged many times in the National Theatre and were incorporated into the dance curriculum. As the result, these revival productions morphed into a form of neo-traditional dance which remains preserved until today.</p>
1980(2523)-1985 (2528)	In 1981, Thailand oversaw the awakening of cultural promotion in the government of PM. Prem Thinsulanonda. The national cultural policy was issued.	<p>Arkom Sayakom, the master of Wai Khru Ceremony during 1962-1982 suddenly died. In 1984, the FAD invited the King to appoint 7 senior teachers to act as Masters of <i>Wai Khru</i>. This is the first start of the royal line of the <i>Wai Khru</i> ceremony.</p> <p>In 1985, the first national artist award was conferred.</p> <p>Chulaongkorn University was the first institution to offer a higher degree in dance on 3 levels: a bachelor degree in 1988, master degree in 1992, and doctoral degree in 2000.</p>
1994(2537)-Present	<p>The Government designated the year 1994 as the official year of Thai Cultural Preservation. This was later extended to 1997, in order to foster cultural identity.</p> <p>In 1999, <i>A Great Reform of Education in Thailand: the National Education Act of BE.2542</i> (1999) was issued with many changes in the educational system.</p>	<p>In 1998, the state established the Bunditpatanasilpa Institute as the national university for the arts.</p> <p>In 2002, the Ministry of Culture was re-established.</p> <p>In 2007, Bunditpatnasilpa Institute was elevated to a status that was equal to that of a department, distinguishing itself from the FAD and functioning directly under the Ministry of Culture.</p>

Appendices B: Consent Form



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Proposal and Consent Form for Research Projects

Title of Research Project: Tradition and Transformation of Thai Classical Dance

Name and title of Researcher, and Details of Project:

My name is Pawinee Boonserm, PhD student in Drama, University of Exeter, UK

This research project aims at investigating the shift of Thai classical dance after the revolution of 1932 when the patronage of court dance was changed from royal to the state support. It explores the relationship between the classical dance and nation, analysing the role and the consequence of state patronage and promotion in Thai classical dance focusing on the reconstruction of Thai classical dance, the promotion of the spiritual power in the '*Wai Khru*' ceremony and dance pedagogy.

The project will run from September 2012-2016

Definition of invited participants:

There are four types of participant invited to take part in this research project

1. The senior dance teachers who have experience of training and teaching from the period of 1932 to the present.
2. Dance teachers who currently teach at the College of Dramatic Arts, and at the Department of Dance in the university.
3. Master of *Wai Khru* ceremony both in the official line and unofficial line.
4. Dance artists in the Office of Performing Arts, the Fine Arts Department who have experienced and involved in classical dance drama.

Data or information to be collected, and the use that will be made of it:

These will be single semi-structured interviews of a standard duration of not more than 30-60 minutes. Interviews will be audio recorded, and the researcher will transcribe the interviews verbatim. It is not possible to guarantee anonymity for the interviewee who will be identified in the thesis and any subsequent presentations or publications by name and/or professional role. Extracts from the interview may be quoted in the PhD and in any conference presentations and publications arising from the research.

How will the information supplied by participants be stored?

During the project, information gathered will be stored on my personal computer and a backup will be kept on a digital database in the Drama Department of the University of Exeter. After submission, the thesis with the above-mentioned information will be available in the reference section of the library at the University of Exeter. Portions of the thesis may be published in books or academic journals.

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Consent:

I voluntarily agree to participate, and agree to the use of my data for the purposes specified above. I can withdraw consent at any time by contacting the interviewer.

Note: Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

Printed name of participant:

Signature of participant:

Preferred contact - email or telephone:

Signature of researcher:

One signed copy to be retained by the researcher, and one by the participant.

Appendices C: Interviews

Four types of interviewees were invited to take part in this research project: senior dance teachers who have experience of training and teaching from the period of 1932 to the present, dance teachers who currently teach at the College of Dramatic Arts, and at the Department of Dance at the university level, Masters of the *Wai Khru* ceremony and dancers of the *Ong Phra Phirap* both in the official line and unofficial lines, and dance artists in the Office of Performing Arts, at the Fine Arts Department who have experienced and been involved in classical dance drama.

1. Senior dance teachers and national artists

1.1. **Suwannee Chalanukhro** was the most senior dance master who was a part of the last group of royal dancers during the late reign of King Rama VII. She trained in dance at the Academy of Dance and Music when it was first established post-1932. She was a renowned dance artist in the Fine Arts Department during the period of classical dance revival from the 1940s to the 1960s wherein she gathered experience in performing several main characters, especially the male protagonist. She not only performed as a dancer but also taught at the College of Dramatic Arts for many years before being transferred to teach at the Department of Dance at Chulalongkorn University. She was felicitated by the Ministry of Culture as a National Artist in Thai dance in 1990. She currently works as a dance expert for many dance institutions and mainly teaches at the Department of Dance, Chulalongkorn University. (Interviewed on 26 January 2015 at Chulalongkorn University).

1.2. **Rachana Pungprayong** was trained in dance at the College of Dramatic Arts from 1952 and later worked as a dance artist at the Office of Performing Arts under the project of reserve artists of the Office of Performing Arts since 1959. During that period, she had much experience of performing many main

characters in the productions of the Fine Arts Department. She was felicitated as a national artist in classical dance in 2010. She currently works as a dance expert in the Office of Performing Arts, the Fine Arts Department and also teaches dance in many dance institutes. (Interviewed on 3 December 2014 at Thailand Cultural Center)

- 1.3. **Associate Prof. Chanthana Iamsakun** trained in dance at the College of Dramatic Arts during the period 1962-1970 as the representative student from the Phitsanulok province, under the project of the Fine Arts Department that provided scholarships for students from the countryside. Later she worked as a dance teacher at the College of Dramatic Arts from 1973 to 1994. During that period, she gathered experience of performing and teaching dance not only at the College of Dramatic Arts but also at other dance institutes. Currently she is an Associate Professor at Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Thammasat University. (Interviewed on 21 and 28 January 2015 at Thammasat University).
- 1.4. **Noppharat Wangnaitham** started her studies at the College of Dramatic Arts in 1946 until she graduated at an advanced level in 1959. She has a lot of experience of performing in many productions of the Fine Arts Department. After finishing the degree, she taught at the College of Dramatic Arts and Chulalongkorn University until she retired. Currently, she is recognised as a dance expert and is invited to teach in many dance institutes. (Interviewed on 27 January 2015 at the College of Dramatic Arts).
- 1.5. **Boonnak Tantranon** was a student of the College of Dramatic Arts since 1952 and later worked as the reserve young artist of the Office of Performing Arts from 1959 until she retired in 2007. She was the dancer who first performed the character of Manohra in the dance drama production *Manohra* at the Music and Dance Public Organisation in 1954. She is also experienced in performing

several characters in Fine Arts Department productions, especially female protagonists. Currently, she is a dance expert who works in many areas such as a consultant of *Khon* at the Sala Chalermkrung Royal Theatre, as a dance teacher at University of Thai Chamber of Commerce, Bunditpatanasilpa Institute and the amateur dance troupe of *Khon* at Thammasat University. (Interviewed at 17 December, 2014 at University of Thai Chamber of Commerce and 25 January 2015 at Sala Chalermkrung Royal Theatre).

- 1.6. **Nongyua Amrunpongwattana** was a dance student at the College of Dramatic Arts during the period 1949-1959. Later, she taught at the College of Dramatic Arts from 1962 to 1976 and then transferred to teach at Loei Rajabhat University in 1976, and the Department of Dance at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University in 1980 where she worked until she retired. (Interviewed on 2 December 2014 at Thailand Cultural Center).

2. Dance teachers in the College of Dramatic Arts and Bunditpatanasilpa Institute

- 2.1 **Dr. Chanai Vannalee** was one of the committee members to develop the curriculum of the Bunditpatanasilpa Institute when it was first established in 1999, and is currently in charge of the Master Curriculum in 2010. He has currently been a secretary of Post Graduate Research Dance, Bunditpatanasilpa Institute. (Interviewed on 25 March 2016 at Bunditpatanasilpa Institute).

- 2.2 **Asst. Prof.Dr. Jintana Saitongkum** trained in dance at the College of Dramatic Arts between 1970 and 1980 and taught there from 1984 to 2003. She was one of the committee members responsible for the continuation program of College of Dramatic Arts and the Rajamangala Institute of Technology in 1990s. In 2004, she was transferred to teach at Bunditpatnasilpa Institute. She currently is the

Associate Dean for Academic Affair and Research and the Deputy Dean of the Fine Arts Faculty. (Interviewed on 29 March 2016 at Bunditpatanasilpa Institute)

2.3 **Assistant Prof. Kwanjai Kongthaworn** studied at the College of Dramatic Arts in 1983, graduated in 1993 and taught there until 2008. She is a skillful dancer and teacher which has a lot of experience of performing main characters of productions of the Fine Arts Department and College of Dramatic Arts. In 2009, she transferred to teach at the Bunditpatanasilpa Institute. Currently, she is Associate Dean in Art and Culture, Quality Assurance and Public Relations in the Fine Arts Faculty, Bunditpatnasilpa Institute. (Interviewed on 25 March 2016 and 6 April 2016 at Bunditpatnasilpa Institute).

2.4 **Chalemchai Piromrak** is a dance master teaching in the Angthong College of Dramatic Arts. He was the head of the Folk dance division in 1995-2002, the Head of the *Khon* division in 2002-2009 and the head of the Dance Department in 2013-2016. As a committee member, he helped to develop the dance curriculum of the College of Dramatic Arts. Currently he is a Vice –Rector of Bunditpatnasilpa Institute. (Interviewed 23 April 2016 at Waterloo Station in London).

2.5 **Pramjai Pengsuk** graduated from the College of Dramatic Arts and has been teaching there since 1999. She is currently a senior professional level teacher and one of the committee members to develop the dance curriculum in the Dramatic Arts College (Interviewed on 2 December, 2514 and 28 March 2016 at the College of Dramatic Arts).

3. **Masters of *Wai Khru* ceremony and Dancers who received the rights to perform *Ong Phra Phirap* Dance both in the official line and unofficial line.**

3.1. **Sombati Kaewsujarit** was a senior master of the *Wai Khru* Ceremony who in 1984, became the last master to be given the right to lead the *Wai Khru* ceremony

by the monarch. In terms of his work experience, he took a lead position in many regional Dramatic Arts College such as Sukhothai, Nakhon Sithammarat, Kalasin, Roi-Et, Angthong provinces. His last position before retirement was as the Director of the Office of Performing Arts. (Interviewed on 27 January 2015 at the College of Dramatic Arts)

3.2. **Dr.Chulachart Aranyanak** is a dance teacher and currently a deputy director for higher education at the College of Dramatic Arts. His reputation lies in performing the demon character in *Khon* performances. He is able to perform *Naphat Ong Phra Phirap* both in official and unofficial versions. He was part of the fourth generation of royal lineage to receive the official right to perform *Ong Phra Phirap* which was arranged by the Fine Arts Department on 12 September 2002, and was handed down the unofficial line by Khru Vanich Chienwong on 29 July 2010. (Interviewed on 28 March 2016 at the College of Dramatic Arts).

3.3. **Captain Dr. Akarin Pongpandecha** is an independent scholar who privately trained in dance by many renowned dance masters of the Fine Arts Department. He is capable of performing both official and unofficial versions of the *Ong Phra Phirap*. He was privately granted the right to perform the official *Ong Phra Phirap* version from his three of significant masters; Khru Rakhop Bhodivesa, Khru Siriphan Attawatchara and Khru Chulachart Aranyanak in September 2008. On the other hand, the right to perform in the unofficial lineage was passed on to him by Khru Vanich Chienwong on 29 July 2010, on the same occasion as Chulachat Aranyanak, mentioned above. (Interviewed on 28 March 2016 at The Walk, Bangkok)

3.4. **Tada Vithauapul** is an independent scholar who is the main supporter and organiser of the transmission of Khun Ying Nathakanurak lineage which is known as the unofficial line. Tada used to be an amateur *Khon* student of

Thammasat University in 1969. He has a close relationship with Somyos Popiemlarp, the closest and the last pupil of Khun Ying Natthakanurak who was the unofficial master of *Wai Khru* and *Naphat* repertoires versions including the *Ong Phra Phirap* dance. (Interviewed on 4 April 2016 at Tada's house)

3.5. **Thakoon Samranpong** graduated from the College of Dramatic Arts in 1991.

From 1989 to 1992, he privately learned the Khun Ying Natthakanurak version of *Naphat* from Somyos Popiemlarp. Later, he was received the right to be a master of *Wai Khru* ceremony and perform the *Ong Phra Phirap* dance from Khru Vanich Chienwong in 2011 and in 2012 respectively. (Interviewed online on 12 January 2015)

3.6. **Dr. Kerdsiri Noknoi** was handed down an unofficial line both the right to be a master of *Wai Khru* ceremony in 2011 and perform *Ong Phra Phirap* dance in 2012 on the same occasion as Thakoon Samranpong, mentioned above. He has B.A. in classical dance from Bunditpatnasilpa Institute, M.A. from Chulalongkorn University and PhD. from Mahasarakham University. He is currently work as Associated Dean of the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Mahasarakham University. (Interviewed online on 12 May 2015)

4. Dance artists in the Office of Performing Arts, the Fine Arts Department

4.1. **Dr. Pairoj Thongkumsuk** has been working as a Music and Drama Academician at a Professional level at the Office of Performing Arts and is also a member of Royal Institute specialist in Thai classical dance. He has a B.A. in classical dance from the College of Dramatic Arts and Rajamangala Institute and an M.A. and PhD.in classical dance in Chulalongkorn University. (Interviewed on 31 March 2016 at the Office of Performing Arts).

- 4.2. **Dr. Treeradach Klinchan** is a renowned Thai dance artist of the Office of Performing Arts in a strong experience of performing male characters. He graduated from Lopburi College of Dramatic Arts, and has an M.A. in classical dance from Chulalongkorn University and PhD. from Mahasarakham University. (Interviewed on 25 March 2016 at the Office of Performing Arts)
- 4.3. **Akkanun Phantoorak** graduated from Bunditpatnasilpa Institute in 2001. She taught there from 2001 to 2005. In 2005, she begin to work as the dance artist of the Fine Arts Department. (Interviewed on 19 June 2015 at the Lancaster Gate Hotel in London).
- 4.4. **Julsub Doungpattra** graduated from the Bundipatanasilpa Institue in 2004 and became a dance artist at the Office of Performing Arts in 2005. (Interviewed on 8 December 2015 at the Office of Performing Arts).

Appendices D: An Example of a Transcript

This is the transcript of an interview on 26 January 2015 at Chulalongkorn University with Suwannee, the last of the royal dancers, mentioned in appendix one. We sat in the dance studio at the Department of Dance after she had finished class and we talked for approximately ninety minutes.

Pawinee: When did you start learning dance?

Suwannee: I first started learning when I was eight years old.

Pawinee: How about before that?

Suwannee: I learned from *Lakhon Luang* for Prajadhipok (or King Rama VII). I was 6 years old and I was the youngest. There were parts for seniors, middle- ages and younger people but I was the youngest.

Pawinee: How did you learn?

Suwannee: Through one-to-one tutorials. My first teacher was Khru Pi Wilai Singhapan. My second teacher, later, was Khru Jad. I can't remember the surname. After learning for a while, there was a governmental reformation. *Khon* and *Lakhon* were abandoned and these were under supervision by the Fine Arts Department. And then the Fine Arts Department established the School of Dance and Music by Luang Wichit in B.E. 2477 (or 1934 AD) and I arrived in B.E.2478 (or 1935 AD). Those seniors were teenagers and I was only eight years so I had to study at school whereas others did not have to attend school classes. I had to perform a female's role since I was at *Prathom* 4 and *Mathayom* 1 and *Mathayom* 2 (or Years 4, 5, 6). When I studied at *Mathayom* 4 (or Year 8) I studied with Khru Lamoon and I was indebted to Khru Lamoon because I was made the protagonist for every play in *Lakhon Nok* and *Lakhon Nai*, So, I always performed the protagonist.

Pawinee: What was your first play in which Khru Lamoon supported you?

Suwannee: The first play was *Ram Sawannakong* (A solo dance in the episode of *Inao*) performed at the German Embassy. I am most grateful to Khru Lamoon. Without Khru Lamoon, I wouldn't have come this far.

- Pawinee: Were you taught separately?
- Suwannee: Yes, Khru Lamoon gave me private tutorials.
- Pawinee: And from that moment on, you no longer played a female's role.
- Suwannee: Yes, my first role was Inao. And it started from that. When I was forty years old, I didn't want to perform any more. Because I was old, I didn't want the general public to be disillusioned with me. So, I retired myself. When I watched *Lakhon Nok*, I often heard people asking when the male protagonist would stop performing. Khun Chalong, for example, his audience said when he would retire. Why didn't he let someone else perform the male protagonist? So, I reflected on myself and I didn't want to be that. So, I rushed to the director of the department and the director asked, 'Why stop?' I didn't want to perform but I didn't dare to speak. So, I performed the last play, *Phraya Phanong* and afterwards I didn't play anything. So, Khru Lamoon taught me to become a teacher.
- Pawinee: At the College of Dramatic Arts?
- Suwannee: Yes, at Dancing Arts College. I have been teaching there since. When the organisation *Kong Klang Sangkeet* (the Office of Performing Arts) was established, the General Director said that I was not suitable for that. I was told that I was suitable for performing arts so I had to move on, leaving Khru Lamoon and others at the college. Pi Chamneang and me and one more person moved to *Klong Klang Sangkeet* (the Office of Performing Arts) because I was told that I was suitable. I had been working there until ... [laughs].
- Pawinee: When you were young, what dance were you trained in?
- Suwannee: Yes, *Phleng Cha* and *Phleng Reo* with many dance pieces such as *Chet*, *Sa-me*, *Maibot*, *See Nuan*, *Fon Ngeaw*, *Fon Tean*, *Dao Wadung*, and *Rabam* and *Naphat* dance such as *Trainimit*, *Trabongkan*. But some movements like *Kukphat*, *Ruwsamla*, *Mue Samrarn*, *Bathsakunee* I did not know how to do.
- Pawinee: Did you not learn those movements?

Suwannee: No, I didn't learn them back then but I did learn them when I was older.

Pawinee: They are not in the curriculum?

Suwannee: They are not in the curriculum. *Kuk Phart Mua Samrarn, Baht Sakunee, Phee Nueang, Phee Song*. (in First Year, Second Year)

Pawinee: In the past, they didn't exist in the first year or second year?

Suwannee: No, only *Mor Hok* (or Mathayom Six, or Year ten).

Pawinee: So, for those who graduated, what did they do for a living?

Suwannee: There would be an opening and when I was 18 years old, and there was an opening, I did take the exam and I was appointed at the Dancing Arts College. My salary was twenty-four Baht. It was a lot of money.

Pawinee: In those days, did you learn *Maibot*?

Suwannee: Yes, I studied that because *Maibot Yai* is the heart of dancing. But at *Lakhon Luang* (royal dance troupe), they already danced *Thep Pranom, Rabam Yai, Sii Bot* and they performed the whole *Bot*. Whatever it was, slow or fast, they could dance. They could earn a living easily.

Pawinee: Did you live to see *Chao Khun Khru* (Phraya Natthakanurak)?

Suwannee: I lived in *Lakhon Luang* (Royal dance troupe), so I saw him because he admitted me. When I was young, I loved singing and I was noticed by Chao Wantha, who said, 'Suwannee, I'd like to take you to the palace court to see performances.' When I was inside, I was amazed and I was almost attracted to those dances. I asked Chao Montha to take me but he said he needed to ask Chao Khun Khru whether he would accept me. And they talked to each other and I was taken to see Chao Khun Khru and I was asked to perform and practice how to speak, how to crawl and how to do things before Chao Khun Khru. I also took with me flowers, incense sticks and candles to pay respect to him. I was asked, 'What's your name?' I answered, 'Suwan ka', 'What's your surname?' 'Sibunyarak chaoka' 'How old?' 'Six years ka' 'Did anybody force you to be in the dancing arts?' 'Nobody forced me. I want it on my own chaoka.' Then they asked among them, 'Which role should she do?' 'With this small body, it's better with a female's role.' So, I performed

a female's role. Chao Khun Khru accepted me and then said, 'Mae Wantha, take this girl to get some training with Wilailak' so I got one-to-one training. Phee Wilai was very beautiful. Beautiful nose. But Phee Wilai didn't come to the Fine Arts Department while others came. Khun Det didn't come either. He played Phra Lak. Mom Tuan Suphalak performed very well but he didn't teach anybody.

Pawinee: Was it the same movement as noted here?

Suwannee: No, that was by Khru Leay and Khru Leay was the last to get in. And after Khru Leay, there was nobody else. I felt sad to know that nobody asked Mom Tuan to teach them how to perform. Do you know that there are many branches of plays? Never let it be said that they make a wrong dance movement. There are many branches and they don't make mistakes. It depends on the person who performs and how it is received. Nowadays, for *Lakhon Nok* and *Lakhon Nai*, some movements were danced with the same style, probably because they were from the teacher.

Pawinee: Because it is from the College of Dramatic Arts, the Fine Arts Department?

Suwannee: Chao Khun Phra might perform differently. It is different from the Fine Arts Department.

Pawinee: Can anybody perform?

Suwannee: Nobody else apart from me. I asked Khru Phan for the reason why it was not taught to others and I was told that it was impossible because Lamoon had set rules. So, we couldn't change. Later generations have to respect that.

Pawinee: So, Khru Lamoon has set the curriculum for what to be taught. Did all the teachers have to change their movements so that they were similar before these movements were taught?

Suwannee: We had to follow the movements set out by Khru Lamoon. To illustrate with an easy movement, a smile is usually accompanied with a left hand but in *Rabam*, a female protagonist needs to use her right hand. Why not left hand? Because you can turn round. Let's sing an example.

[We sing the same melody].

Pawinee: The female protagonist has to be beautiful.

Suwannee: Yes, you can try dancing. I was asked, ‘Why? Who designed this dance movement?’ So, I said, ‘Khru Lamoon.’ And that’s the end of the question. Khru Lamoon says that a female protagonist smiles with her right hand.

Pawinee: Did you ask Khru Lamoon why?

Suwannee: I wouldn’t dare to ask. Who dared? And nowadays with some movements such as Cherdcharn (one of the *Naphat* dance), people make wrong dance movements.

Pawinee: What are the right movements?

Suwannee: Out of rhythm! [humming the tune] Noi Noi Nee Noi ... Noi Noi Noi Nee Nai. For this dance movement, I highly appraise Khru Mahn. Because I listened to human voices, people came to talk to me and I told them to keep to the rhythm. As a national artist, don’t make a wrong move which looks ridiculous. However, if someone performs like this [showing gesture], I allow that to pass because I was taught like that too.

Pawinee: We don’t know that.

Suwannee: There are many other movements such as *Choraka Buang Song*, *Suranagong* and in *Inao*. I respect Chirat for this but Phee Wahn has a movement as a prelude. But for me, I start singing immediately. [humming the tune] Nee Noi Nee Noi. Dusadee added this because Phee Wahn lacked it. I am very grateful because I like to listen and that is why everybody tells me what they know.

Pawinee: Can you tell me more about your day at school? Is it similar to the present?

Suwannee: We studied *Lakhon* for two hours but everyday. The rest of the day was for other subjects.

Friend: Did you study *Lakhon* in the afternoon?

Suwannee: It depended on the timetable. On some days, we studied Lakhon in the afternoon whereas on other days, we studied one subject before Lakhon in the morning. But we had to study Lakhon for two hours every day.

Pawinee: When you studied at college, was it part of *Khom Mahorasop* (Department of Entertainment)?

Suwannee: Yes.

Pawinee: Was the tutorial one-to-one?

Suwannee: Yes.

Pawinee: What happened to other students?

Suwannee: They just danced on their own. They practiced *Phleng Cha* and *Phleng Reo*.

Pawinee: So, in your case, Khru Wilai picked you out for one-to-one tutorials because you were the youngest?

Suwannee: Yes.

Pawinee: Then, when you were 8 years old, you studied at Dancing Arts College?

Suwannee: Yes, but because of the political reformation, we all had to move.

Pawinee: Whom else did you study with?

Suwannee: Mom Khru Tuan. Khru Lamoon. Two teachers. That was the earliest period and Mom Khru Tuan and Khru Lamoon set out the foundation for dancing arts. Later, Khru Mahn came and Khru Mahn was good at *Lakhon Nok* and then Khru Pahn arrived. And then Khru Hoon who taught about female protagonists. And then Khru Nohm, Khru Gaysorn. And then Phee Arht, Khru Charoenjit.

Pawinee: There wasn't much record for Khru Hoon, Khru Nohn and Khru Gaysorn. Why? Where were they from?

Suwannee: Younger generations ... Mohn Khru was the head. These teachers (Khru Hoon, Khru Nohn, Khru Gaysorn) were from big theatre companies. Khru Gaysorn danced very well. That's why she was called

Khru Gaysorn. Khru Mahn was called Samahn because of the beautiful play as a role of deer (Samahn is deer in Thai), in a play by Wanchalee.

Pawinee: When you were young, did you have a chance to see performances by Krom Phraprayunrawong (one of the famous royal dance troupe)?

Suwannee: No, I didn't.

Pawinee: Because there was a close down and these teachers were taken away to teach instead?

Suwannee: Yes, and I felt that it shouldn't be closed down because of their good performance?

Pawinee: Do you think the launch of Fine Arts College means that other kinds of *Lakhon* disappeared because these had to be performed according to standards?

Suwannee: Yes, there was one male protagonist, in my life, I never feared any male protagonist except for this one in one theatre, Chalerm Sak School. I was afraid of Chalerm Sak.

Pawinee: Who taught at Chalerm Sak School?

Suwannee: I don't know but I knew Khru Nokkaew because she told me about songs and [singing]. I was afraid of Chalerm Sak actors because it was ... For example, *Inao*.

Pawinee: Where did they perform?

Suwannee: On TV. Female protagonists were also beautiful. This female actress moved to Suan Sunandha College. I don't remember her name but I don't think she is still alive.

Pawinee: Does it mean that in the past there was more than one organisation where dances were performed?

Suwannee: Yes, apart from Dancing Arts Department, Chalerm Sak was the most frightening (or formidable). In Rajathat, the female protagonists were not so formidable. Khunying Worachat. I don't know where Chalerm Sak actors were from. Another theatre was Igong. This was

Khunying Khru Natthakanurak. Another teacher was Phee Lern, Chalernwaen, because of his glasses.

Pawinee: But when their theatres were closed down, they didn't perform anything?

Suwannee: Nowadays, we have *Samphan.Ai Paeng* and *Bamrung Phathayakul* (two famous private dance schools).

Pawinee: I think nowadays they perform what the Dancing Arts Department sets without creating new movements. Am I right to assume that? In the past, Chalernsak invented and performed their own movements. Is that correct?

Suwannee: Yes, but they didn't invent. They performed many episodes of *Inao* but I was afraid of them.

Pawinee: Did they dance the same movements as you?

Suwannee: Yes, they performed much better. Not just the same movements. [Singing] Karaket, Nang Yam... Khru Nokkaew Chalernsak.

Pawinee: So, when Khru Lamoon taught you, did you notice and change your movements?

Suwannee: Yes, for example, when I did this, I was told, 'Change. Do like this.' Talking about teachers, I want to talk about Mom Arjarn, when performing '*Laden Monthee Rueang See*', for twenty times it was different each time. But with Khru Lamoon, each time it was the same. Mom Arjarn changed so often that I got dizzy. I asked, 'Which movement?' and I was told, 'Idiot! I gave you twenty movements and then you just change them to become acquainted and well-experienced.' Khru Lamoon and Mom Arjarn taught in a different manner. Mom Arjarn taught like a curriculum ...

Pawinee: Do you mean Khru Lamoon?

Suwannee: Yes, she taught according to the curriculum. So, it was the same each time. But with Mom Arjarn there were a variety of movements. 'Idiot! There are twenty movements and you can't remember them all. Just think which one you want to master.'

- Pawinee: What about nowadays when you teach other children?
- Suwannee: It depends. With eighty children, it will be different.
- Pawinee: As you came to work since B.E. 2478 (AD 1935?), you must have performed in Luang Wichit plays?
- Suwannee: Yes, every play. There was no play in which I didn't perform, including *Rabam*. Older actors played the role of main protagonists. For example, Khru Prapha for Nang Wantho. Khru Ladda for Mahasuranat. Phee Suwanna played Duangchan. I was young so I sang '*Ma duay kan, Pai duay karn.*'
- Pawinee: Who invented the movements?
- Suwannee: Khru Lamoon and Mom Khru, only two. I think these two teachers were very good. They could do everything. Khru Mahn hadn't been here with us yet.
- Pawinee: At that time, apart from Luang Wichit's theatre, what else was available?
- Suwannee: Luang Wichit didn't do any *Khon* or *Lakhon* because they had their own form. Too bad. Some of them decided to play music instead whereas others decided to become typists and secretaries.
- Pawinee: Didn't they play anything?
- Suwannee: Nothing at all. Some played the violin.
- Pawinee: Did you watch anything about Isuan Prakart Issarapharp (Declaration of Independence)?
- Suwannee: Luang Wichit did it. Phee Song (a dancer) was the first protagonist of the Fine Arts Department, very beautiful. And also played Phra Thida Phraruang (the Princess). She was senior.
- Pawinee: Did you watch *Suriyakup*? What kind of story is it?
- Suwannee: Yes, I did. It's about *Suriyakup* who kidnapped one female character. There is a book which you can find in a library. You can check it. The male protagonist was played by Phee Somphong. Phee Song played the role of *Nang Winyarn* (main character). It was a dance in *Lakhon*.

Luang Wichit made only 3 plays, *Suriyakup*, *Isuan Prakart Issarapharp* and *Phra Thida Phraruang*.

Pawinee: I have a question. People tend to write that *Maibot Yai* was invented in *Suriyakup*.

Suwannee: Phraya Anurak invented it. Khru Sa-ngeam and Khru Wong played it.

Pawinee: In these photos, were the dancing movements invented beforehand?

Suwannee: Yes, from the very beginning by Phraya Natthakanurak. And then Khru Phee Jamneang.

Pawinee: What about songs? Were there any songs? Did you learn how to dance?

Suwannee: I danced both *Phleng Cha* and *Phleng Reo* and actors in Rama VII era danced *Maibot Yai*, *Sii Bot*. Phraya Anurak wrote it and then they danced in *Sii Bot*. They performed them everyday, episode by episode. Phee Fuen danced so well. Phee Dara danced the role of Asura (Demon) very well. *Nara Navi Sathien*.

Friend: Who invented it?

Suwannee: I've just told you. *Maibot* originated in the Rama VII period. You can read the book.

Pawinee: The book suggests that Khru Lamoon invented it during *Suriyakup*.

Suwannee: But these movements were invented beforehand and these were used in *Suriyakup*.

Pawinee: So, they existed before they were put into the curriculum in relation to *Maibot Yai*. Was Phraya Natthakanurak in the Department of Entertainment?

Suwannee: Yes, but not formerly. You have to check the book.

Pawinee: The book says differently.

Suwannee: In what way? Than Chao Khun invented the Thep Phranom movement.

Pawinee: Yes, but the book doesn't say like that. It says Khru Lamoon invented them and played them in *Suriyakup*. And Mae Song added the movements. And then Khru Lamoon danced in front of Phraya

Nattakarn Anurak to watch and Phraya Natthakanurak approved of them and that was how the photos were taken.

Suwannee: Than Chao Khun taught his child first, Thong Tham. Then he performed *Maibot Yai*.

About the Production of the Fine Arts Department

Pawinee: With the World War, what happened?

Suwannee: We've already moved here. Ajarn Dhanit a contemporary of Luang Wichit, worked here. However, their fate was different. Ajarn Dhanit was a secretary whereas Luang Wichit was the head. It's because Khun Dhanit that we still have *Khon* and *Lakhon*. Without him, there would be nothing. We are most grateful to him.

Pawinee: I feel that so many good things have disappeared.

Suwannee: But then we started to renew them. We played *Khon* for three months and then we played *Lakhon* for three months. Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Pawinee: How old were you when Khru Dhanit started *Khon* and *Lakhon*?

Suwannee: I started as a protagonist. Khru Lamoon promoted me. I was around seventeen or eighteen years. I don't remember. Please look it up in my book about national artists.

Pawinee: How many people watched *Khon* and *Lakhon*?

Suwannee: Only twenty people and then one by one started to get away. When they watched Luang Wichit plays, they were impressed. The setting was amazing. The characters needed to be used as a way to move from one scene to another. If a play has eight scenes, there will be eight groups of dancers. There were about twenty and over *Rabam* groups for Luang Wichit. Sixty people. *Lakhon Champhasak*.

Pawinee: Did they practice for a long time?

Suwannee: A long time. Luang Wichit observed and supervised us closely. He slept near us. He ate with us. He taught all feelings to know the male and female characters thoroughly. Khru Lamoon taught how to express

feelings. He was immersed with us and he watched every scene. For every play, it was performed for many months because the settings were grand and luxurious. And there was a large group of viewers. I got headaches. Khun Dhanit started from *Lakhon Nok*, *Krai Thong* but then he played *Lakhon Nai*. For *Lakhon Nai*, if the viewers are not smart enough, it will be very difficult and useless.

Pawinee: It seems that at the beginning Khru Dhanit used the plays written by Krom Phraya Narit? *Khon*?

Suwannee: No, *Khon* is *Khon*. *Dukdamban* is the most difficult *Khon* play. There are many singing scenes. *Dukdamban Inao* contains Chom Dong singing scene. And there are many *Thaang* such as Khun Ying Paitoon and Luang Pradit. Nowadays people adopt Luang Pradit in their plays. I performed according to Luang Pradit School for twenty years at Krom Sinlapakorn (the Fine Arts Department) and when I came to Chula (Chulalongkorn University), I changed to suit myself with Khun Ying Paitoon School. I tried to find her disciples and I found her last disciple and asked her to teach me. And then I adapted to teach my students here at Chula.

Pawinee: And then you added movements?

Suwannee: I already know movements from Luang Pradit and Khru Lamoon. It's mostly during the interval between songs that I learned according to Khun Ying Paitoon School. I asked Wilai (the College of Dramatic Arts) to sing like Khun Ying Paitoon but I was told that people preferred Luang Pradit. But I learned everything from everyone. From every Khun Ying.

Pawinee: So, the problem was from the curriculum which was set?

Suwannee: Yes, Khru Lamoon set it. In this year, students had to learn this and in the next year, they had to learn that. That was quite strict. Nobody dared to argue. For example, a smile must be accompanied by a left hand. [Singing] *Kai Oey Kai Kaew*, the chicken character. Some teachers would argue for male chicken because female chickens cannot shout in the morning. However, there were teachers who believed that

since the protagonist was female, all the rest of the chicken group should be female.

Pawinee: Did Kai Kaew movements exist beforehand or Mae Mun invented them?

Suwannee: Mom Khru taught *Kai Kaew* and Khru Lamoon invented the movements for *Phra Low*. Mom Khru played the role of a female protagonist and then everybody played the female role. But when I taught these outside, I assumed that the chicken was male. I wouldn't want to perform a male chicken.

Pawinee: In the past, does it mean that the movements were not fixed? Everybody has a chance to invent their movements?

Suwannee: Nowadays, all chicken are female according to *Klong Klang Sangkeet* (the Office of Performing Arts, the Fine Arts Department).

Pawinee: Does it mean that in the past before *Phra Low Tarm Kai* (*Phra Low* chasing the chicken) was introduced in the curriculum, people could change their movements? Did *Phra Low Tarm Kai* exist in the curriculum at that time?

Suwannee: Oh, yes. I played the role of Phra Loh and Phee Jamnean played the role of the chicken. In the first generation. But when I grew up, the process of research, commentary and analysis concluded that it was not correct. The chicken must be male. That's why we needed to change the movements.

Pawinee: When you taught at Chulalongkorn University, did you change?

Suwannee: Yes, I changed from female movements to male movements. [singing] *Kai Oey Kai Kaew*.

Pawinee: The College of Dramatic Arts taught one form of movements and you taught another.

Pawinee: We newer generations wouldn't dare to change these movements.

Suwannee: No. Nowadays with Phai Chumphon. [singing] Chumphon Kuen ... Payong. Nam Yotha Oey. Climbing the elephant. People don't know how to ride an elephant or a horse. Don't mention their names. There

were movements for riding the elephant and the horse. [performing gestures] Like this, riding the horse. There are 2 movements for *Leang Pha* (or goat antelope). With *Leang Pha*, you can climb the mountain.

Pawinee: Who told you this is an elephant?

Suwannee: Khru Lamoon. All rules are from Khru Lamoon. She is the best.

Pawinee: So, Khru Lamoon wouldn't just teach because she would say that this is seen as a kind of elephant riding?

Suwannee: Yes. I played *Phai Chumphon* and Khru Lamoon added these movements. Then *Khun Phaen* and *Khun Chang* ride the elephant.

Pawinee: So, it means that education and instruction had a great impact on dancing arts? Nowadays, there is only the College of Dramatic Arts where you can learn and we just believe our teachers without daring to challenge them.

Suwannee: Yes, and there were times when people didn't remember them very well and they were confused.

Pawinee: But when you become mature, you can change.

About Wai Khru Ceremony

Pawinee: What about Khunying Natthakanurak. Did she perform the teacher worship ritual?

Suwannee: Yes, she did but everybody didn't think it was possible because it should have been done by a man and that man should be a monk.

Pawinee: Was it a set rule?

Suwannee: Yes, it was set as a rule.

Pawinee: Why did she do it?

Suwannee: I don't know what to say. Probably because she wanted to show that she could do it. For example, the song '*Ong Phra Phirap*'. Do you know anybody who performs this? They have to do like this, not like

this [showing gestures]. By Khru Tao's teacher, not from Khunying Natthakanurak.

Pawinee: Was it Somyos?

Suwannee: Yes, Somyos. He was very good and was taught directly by Khunying Natthakanurak. In the past, I wanted to meet him very much and I asked my colleague to take me to see him. Theerayut helped me with this. I asked this person to teach me and I was told about '*Ong Phra*' movements and I was asked, 'What kind of movements are they?' I answered, 'Demon.' And I answered correctly. Chao Khun Khru taught this. Phraya Natthakanurak was usually referred to as Chao Khun Khru. However, Khun Ying Khru was the wife Khun Ying Thep. Chao Khun Khru invented these movements. Chao Khun Khru performed the role of male protagonist whereas Chao Khun Ying performed the role of Demon. Khun Ying Khru would like to promote her husband so she added more movements to her husband.

Pawinee: Could a woman perform Pleng Phra Phirarp?

Suwannee: Khun Ying Khru added the movements to her husband. She got them from other teachers and these were passed on to Khru Tao, who was my teacher. Khru Tao was younger than me. I called him 'Teacher' and he called me 'Mother'. I was not embarrassed to learn from somebody who was younger than me if they were better than me. One teacher was only twenty-two years old. He could perform *Krabi Krabong*.

Pawinee: So, in the past, there was no gender restriction with regards to playing *Ong Phra Phirap*. A woman could perform. So, Khun Ying performed the role of Demon and so she could perform *Ong Phra Phirap*.

Suwannee: Yes, there was no rule to say that women cannot perform certain roles.

Pawinee: However, there is a rule now to follow the movements step by step.

Suwannee: For example, the *Kleang Tua* movements in which two bodies need to get closer. There was one actor who performed the role of *Inao*. I was amazed. I didn't learn that because I was told that I had better do my best in what I am best at. Let others do what they are best at. They have good intentions, no jealousy. I listened and I didn't do it.

- Pawinee: So, in the past, any person could teach and perform but in the present time there must be a ritual to give you the right to perform.
- Suwannee: Not necessarily. I learned so many things from Khru Tao. He told me, 'whatever mother wants (i.e., you want), let me know.' I was once offered something but I refused. I had to learn from somewhere else. And then Nang Duen had to stop because Phee Jamnean didn't want to do it.
- Pawinee: So, Khun Ying performed like those in the Fine Arts Department.
- Suwannee: Because she worked in the Fine Arts Department but then she quit. She couldn't accept that and then she resigned. There were so many people who didn't know right from wrong and they kept on doing rhythms instead of something else. They just had no idea what they were doing.

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